

Doing Business with GSA

Do you sell environmental products or services? GSA contracts for recycled content paper, carpet, furniture, alternative fueled vehicles, retread tires, energy-efficient products and environmental services. GSA's concern for the environment goes beyond contracting. Our Affirmative Procurement Program (APP) promotes the purchase of recycled content items designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the purchase and use of environmental products and services by GSA associates. GSA has a program to recycle its construction waste, and we seek to earn the U.S. Green Building Council "LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certified" rating for our new and modernized buildings. Contractors are requested (where feasible) to identify items with pro-environmental characteristics, such as recycled content, energy efficiency and/or reduced pollutants. This information will appear on the Schedule contract brochures and in GSA's online shopping service, GSA Advantage! to assist customers who need to purchase EPA designated items.

Need more copies of this publication?

Download a copy of the manual electronically at any time. Visit <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness> and click on "Publications". Call the headquarters Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU) at (202) 501-1021 or your Regional Small Business Utilization Center (SBUC) representative (see Chapter 7).

Printed 2003

Made with 30% Recycled Content Paper

Message to New and Prospective Contractors

The United States Federal Government is the world's largest market place. Every 20 seconds of each working day, the Government awards a contract. As the Government's chief acquisition agency, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) spends billions of dollars annually on products and services offered to all Federal Agencies. Because we buy and leverage so much and use taxpayer dollars, GSA has a special responsibility to obtain the best quality and value possible for money spent. GSA awards a majority of its contracts to small businesses since they generate the majority of new jobs and contribute substantially to the Nation's economy. As GSA's small business advocate, the Office of Small Business Utilization will continue to engage in strategies that provide opportunities in Government procurement for small businesses (including small disadvantaged businesses, veteran-owned, women-owned small, and small businesses located in Historically Underutilized Business Zones). Accordingly, the Office of Small Business Utilization is pleased to provide you with this guide --- Doing Business With GSA --- to help you understand and participate in a wide world of contracting opportunities. This publication is also made available on our website at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>. GSA wants to do business with you; therefore, we want to provide you with the information that will make the process of awarding prime contracts, subcontracts and getting on GSA schedule, an easy task. GSA Small Business Utilization Centers are located nationwide to help you get started. Please contact your Regional Small Business Utilization Center (see Chapter 7) for guidance.

Felipe Mendoza
Associate Administrator
Office of Small Business Utilization
GSA Office of Small Business Utilization
U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405-0002
www.gsa.gov

Table of Contents

Introduction

Where to Start	5
----------------------	---

Chapter 1

Small Business Contacts and Programs	6
Office of Small Business Utilization	6
Regional Small Business Utilization Centers.....	6
Small Business Technical Advisors (SBTAs).....	7
Small Business Programs	7
Who Is Eligible for Small Business Programs?	9
Small Business Administration Programs.....	10

Chapter 2

About GSA	11
GSA's Mission	11
How GSA Is Organized.....	11
What GSA Buys	11
How GSA Buys.....	12

GSA's Major Buying Activities	12
Federal Supply Service (FSS).....	12
Federal Technology Service (FTS)	15
Public Buildings Service (PBS)	15

What GSA Sells	16
-----------------------------	-----------

Chapter 3

Strategic Marketing for Government Contracting	18
Steps to Success in Contracting with the Federal Government.....	18
Tips on Obtaining a GSA Schedules Contract.....	20

Chapter 4

Marketing Tools for Small Businesses	21
Focus your Marketing Efforts	21
Seek Subcontracting Opportunities	22
Participate in Small Business Activities	23
Use Existing Resources	24
Consider Other Resources	24

Chapter 5

Electronic Commerce (EC)	26
Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)	26
Sources of Information for EC/EDI.....	26
Electronic Funds Transfer	27
Federal Acquisition Computer Network	27

Chapter 6

Procurement Procedures	28
Procurement Regulations.....	28
General Contracting Requirements.....	29
Simplified Acquisition Purchases.....	30
Sealed Bid Purchases.....	32
Sealed Bid Purchases.....	33
Requesting an Invitation for Bid (IFB).....	32
Negotiated Procurement	35
Architect/Engineer Selection Process	36
Contract Performance and Completion.....	37
Operating Requirements	37
Performance Review	37
Submitting Your Invoice	38
Contract Appeals	38
Alternative Dispute Resolution.....	38
Contract Award Tips	38

Chapter 7

Contacts	39
OSBU	39
OSBU/SBUCs	39
Regional map.....	40
SBTAs	41
FSS	42
FTS	42
PBS	43

Appendices

A. Websites	45
B. Glossary of Terms	46
C. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions.....	48

Introduction

Where to Start

As a first step, we suggest that you read and understand this publication. It will introduce you to doing business with GSA. This publication is divided into seven sections with appendices. In this publication you will learn about the role of the Office of Small Business Utilization, the Regional Small Business Utilization Centers and the Small Business Technical Advisors. You will be provided with the General Services Administration's (GSA's) organizational structure. Additionally you will be provided with some strategies for contracting with the Federal Government, procedures for obtaining a GSA Schedules contract, and some successful marketing tools. There is a basic introduction to electronic commerce, a basic overview of the methods of procurement used in the Federal Government, contacts that should prove helpful, and finally, helpful websites, a glossary of terms and answers to some frequently asked questions relative to doing business with the Government.

Chapter 1

Small Business Contacts and Programs

The U.S. General Services Administration is committed to the fullest possible participation of small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, HUBZone small, veteran-owned small and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses in its procurement programs. The responsibility for helping to meet this goal is centered in the Office of Small Business Utilization, its Regional Small Business Utilization Centers (SBUCs) and the Small Business Technical Advisors (SBTAs).

Office of Small Business Utilization

The Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU) is located at headquarters in Washington, DC, and has nationwide responsibility for GSA's small business programs. The OSBU also has Regional Small Business Utilization Center (SBUC) representatives in 12 key locations around the country. The mission of the OSBU is to "Engage in activities, which contribute to an environment that provides access to opportunities for small, minority-owned, women-owned, HUBZone, veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran owned small business owners in GSA contracting nationwide, as mandated by law." The OSBU's vision is "Building Small Business Capacity for the 21st Century". This vision is carried out through policies, programs and contacts with the small businesses and GSA acquisition communities. The OSBU helps to develop legislation, regulations, small business programs and subcontracting requirements to ensure that small businesses are given every maximum practical opportunity to engage in the Federal procurement process. The OSBU publicizes and explains the small business programs through conferences and seminars, educational activities and small business- targeted publications about GSA contracting procedures and opportunities. The OSBU also provides liaison services on small business matters between GSA, Congress, the Small Business Administration and other Federal agencies. You may find information on upcoming procurement events, networking sessions and other offerings through the OSBU's homepage at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>. See Chapter 7 for contact information on the Office of Small Business Utilization in Washington, DC.

Regional Small Business Utilization Centers

The Regional Small Business Utilization Centers should be your first point of contact. Specialists in each center can quickly tell you if GSA buys what you sell. They will assist you in identifying appropriate marketing strategies and in obtaining forms and other required documents. Specialists will advise you and provide key contacts related to your firm's products and services. Regional Small Business Utilization Center representatives will help small businesses understand GSA contracting rules and procedures including GSA's small business programs. They also monitor local GSA contracting programs to ensure that small firms get a fair share of GSA contracts and subcontracts and find ways of expanding their participation. See Chapter 7 for contact information and the respective geographic areas of responsibility of the Small Business Utilization Center representatives.

Small Business Technical Advisors

GSA has three major buying activities—Federal Supply Service (FSS), Federal Technology Service (FTS) and the

Public Buildings Service (PBS), further explained in Chapter 2. Each major buying activity has a designated Small Business Technical Advisor (SBTA). These experts provide counseling and guidance on contracting procedures and procurement opportunities within their Service specialties; see Chapter 7 for contact information.

Small Business Programs

GSA, like all Federal agencies, has established goals for awarding contracts to small, minority-owned, women-owned, HUBZone, veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran owned small business owners. To meet these goals, GSA uses “small business programs”. These programs include contact with the small business community, both to inform them about what GSA has to offer, and to help in locating and working with GSA procurement offices. Some small business programs also have “set-asides” under which certain contracts are reserved for competition among small businesses. Information concerning small business programs may be found in the *Federal Acquisition Regulation* (FAR), which is available electronically on the Acquisition Network - AcqNet at <http://www.arnet.gov/>. The small business programs, which are described in the following sections, are among the ways of increasing the number of Government contracts awarded to small businesses. In addition to the information provided below, you may contact GSA’s Office of Small Business Utilization or the Regional Small Business Utilization Center (see Chapter 7) for additional information.

Small Business Set Aside Program Under this program, except for acquisitions set aside for very small businesses, each acquisition of supplies or services that has an anticipated dollar value of over \$2,500, but not over \$100,000, is automatically reserved exclusively for small businesses. The acquisition will be set aside for small business unless the contracting officer determines there is not a reasonable expectation of obtaining offers from two or more responsible small businesses who are competitive in terms of market prices, quality and delivery, (see Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 48 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 19.502-2(a)). Also, the contracting officer shall set aside any acquisition over \$100,000 for small business participation when there is a reasonable expectation that: (1) offers will be obtained from at least two responsible small businesses offering the products of different small business concerns and (2) awards will be made at fair market prices, (see FAR 48 CFR 19.502- 2(b)). Total small business set-asides may be conducted by using simplified acquisition procedures, (see FAR Part 13), sealed bids (see FAR Part 14) or competitive proposals (see FAR Part 15). If the requirement has an anticipated contract value of \$100,000 or less, simplified acquisition procedures are used, with certain exceptions. However, only small businesses are allowed to compete for these contracts. If the anticipated value is over \$100,000, the requirement will be solicited under sealed bid or competitive proposal procedures, (see Chapter 6 for more information on contracting procedures). Partial small business set-asides may be conducted using sealed bids or competitive proposals, (see FAR 48 CFR 19.502-4(a)).

Small Disadvantaged Business Program To give small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs) an opportunity to participate in Federal procurement activities, eligible SDBs may receive price evaluation adjustments when competing for certain requirements. The U.S. Department of Commerce determines the price adjustments available for use in Federal procurements and identifies the industries that are eligible for price evaluation adjustments. On a case-by-case basis, SBA is authorized to determine whether a firm is owned and controlled by specified individuals claiming to be disadvantaged. FAR 2.101 provides a more detailed definition of a small disadvantaged business. To increase opportunities and access for SDBs, Executive Order 13170 was signed on October 6, 2000. The Executive Order states that, as required by law, agencies shall establish a goal of achieving a participation rate for SDBs of not less than 5 percent of the total value of prime contract awards for each fiscal year and of not less than 5 percent of the total value of subcontract awards for each year. It requires agencies to train program and procurement officials on awarding contracts to 8(a) firms and SDBs. Executive Order 13170 also requires that each Federal agency submit an annual report on accomplishments to the President. Doing Business with GSA 7 For additional information concerning the Small Disadvantaged Business Program, contact the U.S. Small Business Administration at (202) 619-1850, or visit their website at <http://www.sba.gov/sdb/index.html>.

Women-Owned Small Business Program GSA establishes goals for the award of contracts to women-owned small businesses each year. The OSBU makes a special effort to advise women on contracting opportunities within GSA and to encourage their participation in competitive procurement programs. For additional information on the Women-Owned Small Business Program, visit <http://www.womenbiz.gov/>. You can contact the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA's) Office of Federal Contract Assistance for Women Business Owners (CAWBO) on (202) 205-7797, or call SBA's Office of Women's Business Ownership on (202) 205-6673, or visit their website at <http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness/>.

Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone) Program

The HUBZone Empowerment Contracting Program was enacted into law as part of the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 1997. The HUBZone Program provides Federal contracting opportunities for certain qualified small businesses located in eligible historically underutilized business zones. Eligible areas cover more than 7,000 urban census tracts, 900 rural areas and every Federally recognized Native American reservation. This helps promote private-sector investments and employment opportunities in urban and rural communities.

The Small Business Reauthorization Act of 2000 contained additional HUBZone legislation, which helped clarify and expand previous legislation. It included:

- A three-year grandfather provision for areas that lose HUBZone designation to allow for return-on-investment.
- Clarification on and authorization of ownership by Indian Tribal Government and certain Native American Communities.
- Expansion to include “Indian Country” to maximize participation by Native Americans, (see 15 U.S.C. 632(p)(6)(c) and 18 U.S.C. 1151).
- Not fewer than 35% of employees of a small business concern owned by an Indian tribal Government, performing a contract awarded on the basis of a preference provided under 15 U.S.C. 657(a), must reside within any Indian reservation governed by one of more of the tribal government owners or reside within any HUBZone adjoining any such Indian reservation.
- Eligibility of Small Business Concerns owned by Community Development Corporations (CDC).

Another HUBZone Rule was effective in February 2001; some areas that this Rule affected include:

- Participating agencies and clarification on applicability to state and local governments.
- Defining of “principal office” in service and construction industries to exclude the concern’s employees who perform the majority of their work at job-site locations to fulfill specific contract obligations, (see 13 CFR 126.103).
- Affiliation rules.
- Expanding participation for resellers and retailers. It allows use of any manufacturer, including a large business, for HUBZone contracts up to \$25,000. Small businesses eligible to participate in the HUBZone Program may seek certification by submitting an application and other required information to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). For additional information on the HUBZone Program, to see if your business is located in a HUBZone, and for more on the HUBZone Rules, visit the SBA website at <https://eweb1.sba.gov/hubzone/internet/>, email hubzone@sba.gov or call (202) 205-8885.

Veteran-Owned Small And Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Program

Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999, amended the Small Business Act. It added small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans to the categories of small businesses for which the Federal agencies develop prime and subcontracting goals. Federal agencies also establish goals and collect data regarding subcontracts awarded by prime contractors to veteran-owned small businesses. For more information on the veteran-owned small or service-disabled veteran-owned small business programs, contact the SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development at (202) 205-6773, or visit SBA’s website at <http://www.sba.gov/vets/>.

Subcontracting Program

Firms with large Government contracts are required by law to establish goals for awarding subcontracts to qualified small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, HUBZone small, veteran-owned small and service disabled veteran-owned small businesses. Each prime contract of \$500,000 or more (\$1 million for construction) with subcontracting possibilities must include subcontracting goals and a plan for meeting those goals. This subcontracting requirement, however, does not apply to contractors who qualify as small businesses. One avenue to assist small businesses seeking subcontracting opportunities with GSA’s contractors is through the *Subcontracting Directory*. The *Subcontracting Directory* lists prime contractors alphabetically by GSA region, products and services, **8** Doing Business with GSA addresses, points of contact and telephone numbers. You may access the *Subcontracting Directory* from the Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU) homepage at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness> by clicking on Subcontracting Directory.

Very Small Business Program

On September 2, 1998, SBA issued a final rule establishing a Very Small Business Set-Aside Pilot Program. Public Law 106-554, enacted in December 2000, extends this pilot program through September 30, 2003. The program is piloted in 10 locations and targets businesses that have historically experienced limited participation in the Federal marketplace. It permits set-asides between \$2,500 and \$50,000. Under the program, a very small business (VSB) is defined as a small business whose headquarters is located within the geographic area served by a designated SBA

district, and together with its affiliates, has not more than 15 employees and has average annual receipts that do not exceed \$1 million, (see 13 CFR 125.7(b)(2)). The program improves access to Federal contracting opportunities for businesses that are substantially below SBA's size standards by reserving certain procurements for competition among such VSBs. The program permits VSBs to receive loan application support and assistance.

Mandatory Source Programs

The Federal Government must purchase certain products and services from non-profit agencies designated by the Committee for Purchase from People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled and from the Federal Prison Industries (FPI, also known as UNICOR), (see FAR 48 CFR Parts 8.6 and 8.7 and 41 CFR Part 51). For information on how to participate in these programs, contact the Regional Small Business Utilization Center in your area, (see Chapter 7).

The Minority Bank Deposit Program

GSA supports the Minority Bank Deposit Program by using minority banks for business transactions.

The Small Business Competitiveness Demonstration Program This Program consists of two major components – (1) unrestricted competition in four designated industry groups and (2) enhanced small business participation in 10 agency targeted industry categories. The goals of the Program are to assess the ability of small businesses in certain designated industry groups to retain a fair proportion of procurement awards in unrestricted competition in those industry groups, and to expand small business participation in 10 targeted industry categories through continued use of set-aside procedures. For a listing of the designated industry groups, see FAR 19.1005(a). For GSA's listing of designated industry groups and targeted industry categories, see GSAM 519.10, Small Business Competitiveness Demonstration Program. The Internet address is <http://www.arnet.gov/GSAM/gsam.html>.

Small Business Administration Programs

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has many programs to help small businesses, ranging from free publications to technical assistance. Local field offices at major cities throughout the country provide SBA services. Locate these offices under "U.S. Government," in the appropriate telephone directory, call 1-800 U ASK SBA, or visit their website at <http://www.sba.gov/> for information on SBA's programs. GSA encourages all small businesses to use the many tools, such as publications, services and programs provided by SBA; Chapter 4 describes some of these tools.

Who Is Eligible for Small Business Programs?

Criteria have been established to determine the eligibility of small businesses to participate in the various small business programs. The following are definitions used by the Government to determine eligibility:

Small business. A business entity that is organized for profit (even if its ownership is in the hands of a non-profit entity), has a place of business in the United States, is not dominant in the field of operation in which it is bidding on government contracts, and qualified as a small business under criteria and size standards in 13 CFR part 121 set by the Small Business Administration (SBA), (see 48 CFR 19.001). Size standards vary from industry to industry. They are spelled out in SBA publications and are available via the Internet at <http://www.sba.gov/size/index/tableofsize.html>

Small disadvantaged business (SDB). An SDB is a small business that is at least 51-percent owned by one or more socially and economically disadvantaged individuals who are citizens of the United States, except for concerns owned by Indian tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, Native Hawaiian Organizations or Community Development Corporations, has received a certification as a small disadvantaged business concern consistent with 13 CFR part 124, subpart B and meets the additional requirements set forth under FAR 13 CFR 124.1002. One or more disadvantaged individuals must also control the management and daily operations with certain exceptions, (see 13 CFR 124.106). African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans and Asian Pacific Americans, among others, are groups that may qualify. SBA is authorized to determine who else qualifies, on a case-by-case basis. FAR 48 CFR 2.101 also provides a definition of "small disadvantaged business concern" as applicable to procurements conducted under the Federal Acquisition Regulations. The Small Business Administration requires businesses seeking "small disadvantaged business" status to undergo a certification process with the SBA.

Woman-owned small business. A small business that is at least 51% owned by a woman or women and who also control and operate the business, (see 15 U.S.C. 632(n) and 48 CFR 2.101).

HUBZone Program. HUBZone small businesses must be 100% owned and controlled by U.S. citizens, and the firm must have its principal office in the HUBZone, (see 13 CFR 126.103). The principal office must be the location where the greatest number of the company's employees at any one location performs their work, (see 13 CFR 126.103). However, for concerns whose "primary industry" (see 13 CFR 121.107) is service or construction, the determination of principal office excludes those who perform work at job-site locations to fulfill specific contract obligations. Also, at

least 35% of the small business' employees must live in a HUBZone, (see 13 CFR 126.200(b)).

Veteran and Service Disabled Veteran. A small business that is at least 51% owned by a veteran or service disabled veteran, and who also controls and operates the business, or in the case of a veteran with permanent or severe disability, the spouse or permanent caregiver of such veteran, (see 15 U.S.C. 632(q)).

Javits-Wagner-O-Day Act (JWOD) participating non-profit agencies. A qualified nonprofit agency employing people who are blind or have other severe disabilities approved by the "Committee for Purchase from People Who are Blind or Severely Disabled" to furnish a commodity or a service to the Government under the JWOD, (see FAR 48 CFR Part 8.7).

Chapter 2

About GSA

(photo) Stephen A. Perry Administrator U.S. General Services Administration

GSA's Mission

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is committed to excellence. GSA's mission is:

"We help Federal agencies better serve the public by offering, at best value, superior workplaces, expert solutions, acquisition services and management policies".

How GSA Is Organized

GSA's headquarters in Washington, DC, houses policy and program offices. GSA also has 11 Regional offices in major U.S. cities and field offices in many locations around the country. GSA's three major buying Services are the:

- Federal Supply Service (FSS)
- Federal Technology Service (FTS)
- Public Buildings Service (PBS)

What GSA Buys

GSA is one of the Federal Government's biggest buyers contracting for billions of dollars worth of products and services each year for its U.S. Government "customers". These customers include most agencies of the executive, judicial and legislative branches and Federal Government and military facilities worldwide. GSA rents, builds, furnishes, and maintains Government offices and buys products ranging from pens to state-of-the-art computers. GSA also contracts for services as varied as trash removal and information technology. Here are a few examples of the thousands of products and services the agency buys.

General Purpose Supplies, Equipment and Services

GSA operates the worldwide purchase and distribution system that other Federal agencies use to buy billions of dollars worth of products and services for day-to-day operations. Most GSA contracts are for standard services and "commercial off-the-shelf" (COTS) products and equipment. These contracts are for:

- Office supplies, furniture and equipment (many made with recycled content materials)
- Motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts including Alternative Fuel Vehicles
- Hand and power tools and hardware
- Paints, waxes, adhesives and brushes
- Lawn and garden equipment
- Light fixtures and bulbs
- Travel arrangements and travel reservations
- Moving of household goods
- Laundry, cleaning equipment and supplies
- Carpets, drapes and blinds
- Hazardous material handling

Information Technology Solutions and Network Services

GSA directs and coordinates Federal purchases of equipment and services for information technology and network solutions, office automation, and telecommunications system and support. Contracting opportunities include:

- Acquisition management and support
- Custom systems design and integration projects
- Office systems support
- Software management
- Data center management
- Financial and administrative systems
- IT technology solutions
- Smart card identification
- Off-the shelf hardware/software
- Disaster recovery and business continuity planning
- Technical and management support
- Local and metropolitan area telecommunications
- Long distance services and support
- International services
- Wireless and satellite services
- Wiring/cable
- Telecommunications system support
- Internet service
- Information security

Building Construction, Repair and Maintenance

GSA, the Federal Government's architect and builder, offers contracting opportunities for building design, construction, repairs, remodeling and maintenance. The agency frequently contracts for:

- Architectural and engineering services
- Construction of new buildings and facilities
- Alteration of office space
- Paving and concrete work
- Elevator installation and repair
- Asbestos assessment and removal
- Air conditioning and heating repair and maintenance
- Roof installation and repair
- Landscaping
- Interior design and decorating
- Demolition
- Pest control
- Cleaning and custodial work
- Building security
- Trash removal
- Property management
- Water purification
- Energy conservation products and services
- Environmental testing and remediation
- Environmental advisory services

How GSA Buys

GSA actively seeks small businesses able to provide local or nationwide services in areas where there are a number of Federal installations. The Government buys supplies and services through contracts issued by GSA offices throughout the country. Many GSA contracts are advertised, awarded and managed through the Regional contracting offices of FSS, FTS and PBS. Most contracts handled through Regional offices are for local or regional delivery. However, some nationwide contracts call for deliveries anywhere in the United States or overseas. These nationwide contracts may be handled by one of the FSS Acquisition Centers. For example, the FSS Acquisition Center in Kansas City, MO, manages all contracts for tools, and the Center in Auburn, WA, manages contracts for environmental services. Acquisition Centers are described further in this chapter. For a list of Acquisition Centers and contact information, see Chapter 7.

Managers of Federal buildings also purchase products and services. Contracting officers located in Regional offices around the country are likely to make purchases of less than \$25,000 from the GSA Schedules Program. Specialists in each Regional Small Business Utilization Center can help you identify opportunities and appropriate contact persons (see Chapter 7).

GSA contracts provide the Government with products and services through a variety of procurement programs carried out according to established Federal and GSA procurement regulations. Doing business with GSA requires knowledge of these basic rules and procedures, these are described in greater detail in Chapter 6.

GSA's Major Buying Activities

(photo) Donna D. Bennett Commissioner, Federal Supply Service

Federal Supply Service

The mission of GSA's Federal Supply Service (FSS) is to assure that the Federal Government's requirements for personal property and administrative services are efficiently met at the least cost to the taxpayer. FSS awards contracts for billions of dollars worth of products and services every year for U.S. Government agencies throughout the world. FSS provides products and services through the GSA Schedules Program, the Stock and Special Order Programs, consolidated purchases and other contracting programs.

For more information on FSS activities, visit the FSS website at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/>; call (703) 305-6477 or 1-(888)-FSS- 0070; or write to the Federal Supply Service Information Center at GSA/FSS, Information Center (FMLI), 1941 Jefferson Davis Highway, Crystal Mall 4, Lobby Level Room 104, Washington, DC 20406.

FSS Acquisition Centers

FSS manages procurements, inventories, supply and distribution, and related activities through nine acquisition centers. Each Center is responsible for worldwide procurement of specific products or services. A Center can procure locally, nationally or internationally, depending on factors such as price, availability, technical requirements, quality levels and delivery terms. The Business Management Directors in each FSS Acquisition Center perform many functions including marketing the Center's programs; answering internal and external customers' questions and concerns; and increasing business in the Center through product line expansion and customer outreach efforts. The Centers, their addresses and telephone numbers and brief descriptions of products or services handled are provided in Chapter 7.

GSA Schedules Program

FSS is responsible for managing the GSA Schedules Program. If you provide products and services, a GSA Schedule contract may help you secure work with other Federal agencies. GSA Schedules are used by the Department of Defense activities and many civilian agencies. Overall, sales in the Schedules program currently exceed \$20 billion. FSS is especially interested in helping small businesses. Over three quarters of Schedule contracts are with small businesses. Agencies can now count orders placed with Schedule small business firms (in most socio-economic categories) toward their procurement goals. Schedule sales to small businesses currently exceed \$8 billion.

GSA Schedules allow GSA customers to buy directly from Schedule contractors, as needed, at favorable prices associated with volume buying. Schedules are indefinite quantity contracts for products and services at stated prices for given periods of time, usually five years. FSS is expanding the multiyear contracts for all Multiple Award GSA Schedules to one five-year basic contract period with three five-year Evergreen option periods. Evergreen options help maintain a contractual relationship with a quality contractor who performs at a level meeting or exceeding performance expectations. Contractors are required to re-certify business status at renewal.

FSS has also expanded the scope of all Schedules from nationwide to worldwide. This expansion now provides contractors with opportunities to increase their customer base, as well as facilitate international customer's use of the Schedules Program. When responding to solicitations, vendors now have the choice of offering (1) worldwide, (2) domestic or (3) non-domestic only delivery.

Although GSA awards most GSA Schedule contracts, authorization may be given to other agencies to award and publish Schedule contracts. A list of current GSA Schedules is available in <http://www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov/elib/eLibrary.jsp>; then click on Schedules listing in top margin. FSS distributes a document for each GSA Schedule, which provides the following information:

- Ordering information for customer agencies;

- A listing of products and services covered under the GSA Schedule; and
- Contract award information on the Schedule, or how to obtain the contract award information.

Identify Environmental Characteristics

Schedule contractors have been requested (where feasible) to identify items with environmental characteristics, such as recycled content, energy efficiency and/or reduced pollutants. This information appears on individual catalogs and/or price lists and assists customers who need to purchase Environmental Protection Agency designated items; see <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/nonhw/procure/index.htm>.

How can you assess the environmental impacts of your products? The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has published guides for ensuring that environmental claims are appropriately used in product marketing and advertising. Contractors must ensure that any environmental claims made about a product (*e.g.*, recyclable, low-VOC, CFC-free) comply with the FTC Guides for Use of Environmental Marketing Claims. The FTC established four general principles for environmental marketing:

- Qualifications or disclosures must be sufficiently clear and prominent to prevent deception.
- An environmental marketing claim should be presented in a way that makes clear whether the environmental attribute or benefit refers to the product, the packaging or both.
- Avoid overstating environmental attributes and claims.
- Present comparative statements in a manner that makes the basis for the comparison sufficiently clear to avoid consumer deception.

FTC also provides guidance on the appropriate use of the following categories of claims:

- Claims of general environmental benefits.
- Claims that the product is “degradable,” “compostable,” or “recyclable”.
- Claims of “recycled content,” “source reduction,” “refillable,” or “ozone safe/ozone friendly”.

You can obtain a copy of the Guide for Use of Environmental Marketing Claims from the FTC Web Site at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/grnrule/guides980427.htm> or from the FTC, Public Reference Branch on (202) 326-2222.

Types of Schedules

FSS buys products and services through two types of Schedules:

Single Award Schedule (SAS)

SASs are contracts with one supplier for a specific product or service at a stated price. Delivery is limited to a specific geographic area defined in the Schedule. Products bought through SASs include fire extinguishers, hoses and nozzles; and some types of furniture, such as folding tables and chairs. Most SASs contain all the information Government buyers need to place orders with vendors. However, some require contractors to provide brochures or lists containing additional ordering information.

Multiple Award Schedule (MAS)

MASs cover contracts made with more than one contractor for a group of related products or services to be delivered worldwide. Contracts are awarded to vendors supplying the same generic type of items at varying prices. Agencies make best value selections when ordering under MASs. GSA awards schedule contracts to responsible companies offering commercial services or products at varying prices, provided that the prices are determined fair and reasonable. GSA's negotiation objective is commonly known as "most favored customer" pricing. Once GSA awards the contracts, customer agencies order directly from the Schedule contractor.

Among the thousands of different products procured in this way are hand tools, construction and building materials, energy saving lighting products, woodworking and metalworking machinery, road cleaning equipment, plumbing and heating equipment, video magnetic tape reels and cassettes, lamps, recycling collection containers, alarm systems and information technology. Services include credit reports, videotape duplication, distribution of audiovisual materials, energy management programs and support for lending libraries.

As a MAS contractor, you must prepare and distribute a catalog and/or price list for customers to use in placing orders. Also, contractors must provide electronic files to allow agencies to order electronically through GSA Advantage! and must maintain a minimum dollar threshold in sales to remain on Schedule.

For more information about the MAS program, visit <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/schedules/> and click on UMAS Virtual Campus, contact the MAS Helpdesk at (703) 305-6566 or e-mail them at schedules.fcoc@gsa.gov.

Maintenance and Repair Schedules

These are competitive SASs for maintenance, repair and rehabilitation of Government personal property (equipment and supplies). Many repair Schedule contracts are awarded under Government set-aside programs for small and

minority businesses. For more information on set-aside programs, see Chapter 1. The Schedule contracts continue to be a bridge to commercial buying practices that offer flexibility, a direct line of supply and the latest technology.

Stock Program

Through the Stock Program, FSS provides a wide variety of common-use items, such as cleaning compounds, paper products and office supplies. The GSA Supply Catalog lists these items. A network of GSA supply and distribution centers, customer supply centers and GSA Advantage!® on-line shopping service makes the items available to Federal agencies. Businesses deliver catalog items to distribution centers unless an order from an individual agency is large enough to make delivery to that agency more efficient. FSS solicits and awards contracts for Stock Program items through sealed bid and negotiated procurements. Contracts can be for periods of one to five years.

Special Order Program

The Special Order Program provides for the purchase and delivery of items not in the Stock or Schedules Programs. GSA establishes Special Order Program contracts for items that have a high demand but are not economical to place in the Stock Program; for example, some furniture items. Agencies place orders with FSS, and vendors ship products directly to the customer. For other than high-demand items with established contracts, agencies may requisition any item, and FSS will initiate action to make the purchase.

Consolidated Purchase Contracts

For certain items, FSS combines orders from a number of Government customers into consolidated purchase contracts, so that it can buy in volumes large enough to obtain price discounts. FSS uses consolidated purchase contracts for all types of Government vehicles. FSS also contracts for vehicle leasing and short-term rentals. For information on motor vehicle acquisition and leasing services, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/home.jsp> or <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/vehicles>; contact a Regional Small Business Utilization Center; or the GSA/FSS Automotive Division at the number given under FSS Acquisition Centers, listed in Chapter 7.

Contracts for Travel, Transportation and Other Services

Using a central purchasing program, FSS contracts for a number of special services. These include hotel/motel discounts and special discount air and rail fares for Federal passengers on official business. FSS also contracts for fleet maintenance, transportation of freight and household goods, overnight mail and a number of other services. For information on the travel and transportation, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/home.jsp>, or contact the Regional Small Business Utilization Center in your area, (see Chapter 7).

(photo) Sandra N. Bates Commissioner, Federal Technology Service

Federal Technology Service

The Federal Technology Service (FTS) is comprised of two business lines: IT (Information Technology) Solutions and Network Services. FTS offers a variety of IT products, services and support, including security solutions. Value added hands-on assistance is also provided to solve IT problems and acquire and manage IT resources. Additionally, FTS offers a wide variety of end-to-end domestic and international voice, data and video services. For more information, visit the website at <http://www.fts.gsa.gov>. For location of FTS Regional Offices visit <http://www.fts.gsa.gov/contact.htm>.

F. Joseph Moravec Commissioner, Public Buildings Service

Public Buildings Service

The Public Buildings Service (PBS) is the Federal Government's property developer, lessor and manager of federally-owned and leased properties. PBS is responsible for planning, designing, building, restoring, renovating, decorating and landscaping Government-owned office buildings and other facilities and for maintenance and security. PBS also leases property for Federal agencies. PBS has a nationwide network of centers and field offices that manage, operate, maintain, alter, preserve and repair all facilities under its custody and control. These centers purchase building materials and services needed to operate and maintain the more than 8,000 Federal buildings managed by GSA. For a list of centers or field offices in your area of activity, contact the Regional Small Business Utilization Center or the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor (SBTA), (see Chapter 7). For more information on PBS contracts visit <http://159.142.200.84/coherence/>. The following sections provide information on specific types of PBS contracts. PBS publishes its requirements in local newspapers, trade journals and technical publications serving the industry, and in GSA's FedBizOpps, which provides vendors access to agency business opportunities 24 hours per day, seven days a week. FedBizOpps also allows vendors to register for automatic e-mail notification of opportunities in their areas of

interest. For more information, see Chapter 4, or visit the Website at <http://www.fedbizopps.gov>.

Types of PBS Contracts

The following sections provide information on the specific types of PBS contracts. For questions on them, contact a Regional Small Business Utilization Center or the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor (SBTA), (see Chapter 7).

Architectural and Engineering Services

PBS, through its Regional offices, awards contracts to architectural and engineering firms for the design of Federal buildings. It also contracts for design and engineering of mechanical and electrical systems, elevators and other building components and for renovation and restoration of existing buildings, including historical structures. GSA acquires architect-engineering services based on evaluation in accordance with published criteria, demonstrated competence and qualifications for the type of professional services required. GSA awards to the most technically qualified firm, after negotiation of a fair and reasonable price. The architect-engineering firms who have been awarded prime PBS contracts generally subcontract other design-related services. These services include soil testing, topographical surveys, design programming and the management and inspection of construction. Prime architectural contractors who are responsible for comprehensive design projects also occasionally subcontract with consulting engineers. See Chapter 6 for more information on architect/engineer contracts.

Construction

PBS delivers its construction programs through 11 Regional offices that manage projects within their geographic boundaries. Contracts for construction or repairs and alterations are usually awarded on the basis of competitive negotiations. Successful offerors must provide bid, performance and payment bonds for construction contracts exceeding \$100,000. Bonds can be obtained through a surety or bonding company. Each PBS Regional office maintains lists of interested prospective offerors.

Space Planning and Interior Design

PBS has a nationwide space planning and interior design program, which awards contracts for services ranging from conventional programming and layout to macro-scale, long-range space planning, interior design guides and space standards. GSA solicits competitive proposals and makes awards on the basis of a firm's experience, qualifications for the work required, understanding of and approach to the project and price.

Art-in-Architecture Program

Under the Art-in-Architecture program, GSA sets aside a minimum of 0.5% of the estimated construction cost of a new building or major renovation for artwork. GSA invites five community representatives, five art professionals and the project architect to collaborate on selecting an artist. This group reviews artists' portfolios and recommends three to five artists to GSA for final selection. The selected artist prepares a proposal, which is reviewed by the community participants; and their final recommendations are forwarded to GSA. Following acceptance of the proposal by the PBS Commissioner, the artist executes the commission.

Office Space Leasing

PBS leases space for most Federal agencies in urban centers of the 50 States; Washington, DC; Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands. PBS contracts for leases through competitive negotiations. PBS has developed a new Minority Leasing Program that will provide small businesses with more access to information on opportunities in the PBS Leasing Program. Contact the PBS SBTA for more information, (see Chapter 7).

Building Services

PBS is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings under GSA control. Regional PBS offices procure services such as cleaning, operation and maintenance of heating and cooling systems, commercial facility management, cafeteria operation, recycling, trash removal, safety inspections, elevator maintenance, lawn maintenance, snow removal and guard services. Larger service contracts often include various services. For example, some custodial service contracts include lawn maintenance and snow removal. Some operations and maintenance contracts include safety and/or fire inspection services. Building Managers/Customer Service Representatives generally have direct procurement authority of up to \$100,000 and frequently buy products and services from small businesses in their areas.

What GSA Sells

Just as GSA awards contracts for the supplies other Federal agencies need to do their work, it also sells property no longer needed by those agencies. Land, buildings and almost every kind of product that GSA buys can be purchased at scheduled, widely publicized sales.

Commonly sold items include:

- Automobiles and trucks
- Airplanes and boats

- Computers, typewriters and other office machines
- Desks, chairs and other office furniture
- Industrial equipment
- Plumbing and heating fixtures
- Residences and building lots, warehouses and office buildings, and land for commercial development

Equipment and supplies (personal property) are sold through on-site auctions, spot bids where buyers submit written bids on site, and sealed bids in response to advertised invitations for bids, (see <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/property>).

Land, buildings and other structures (real property) are often sold by public sales, in the form of a sealed bid, public auction, on-line auction or auction by mail, (see <http://propertydisposal.gsa.gov/Property/>). Sales are made to the highest bidders when bids are at or near fair market value. For more information on GSA sales, available publications include:

How You Can Buy Used Federal Personal Property is available free of charge from the U.S. General Services Administration, Federal Supply Service (FBPS), Washington, DC 20405.

U.S. Real Property Sales List, published bimonthly, lists upcoming real property sales, includes a form to send in to receive notices of future sales, and tells how to access the Sales List on the Internet at <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/browse/channel.jsp?channelId=-13914&channelPage=/channel/default.jsp>, for a free copy of the Sales List, write to Properties, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009. You may also request a copy from any of GSA's Property Disposal Offices listed below, write or call the office that serves your State.

Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin, U.S. Virgin Islands Property Disposal (IPR)
10 Causeway Street, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02222
Telephone: (617) 565-5700; (800) 755-1946

Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
Property Disposal (4PR)
Peachtree Summit Building
401 W. Peachtree Street, Room 2928
Atlanta, GA 30365-2550
Telephone: (404) 331-5133; (800) 473-7836

Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wyoming
Property Disposal (7PR)
819 Taylor Street, Room 9A33
Ft. Worth, TX 76102
Telephone: (800) 833-4317

Alaska, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington
Property Disposal (9PR)
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: (800) 421-7848

Chapter 3

Strategic Marketing for Government Contracting

Steps to Success in Contracting with the Federal Government

To succeed with government contracting, you must ask the right questions.

- *What products or services to sell?*
- *Who to sell to?*
- *What marketing techniques to use?*
- *Who can help with the research?*
- *Where are the bidding opportunities?*

Plan your strategies carefully. There are definite steps to take. The following highlights the key steps to success in contracting with the Federal Government. Please note: Chapter 4, Marketing Tools for Small Businesses, describes many of the tools listed below in further detail.

Define your expertise. Specialize in those products and services that reflect your expertise. Do not try to do everything.

Provide quality product(s) and/or service(s). The Federal Government is seeking best value for their contracted dollars, not just the lowest bid. Your business must be well established with funding and delivery solutions in place before you approach the government.

A computer with Internet access is a necessity, if you want to pursue government contracting. The Federal Government is using e-commerce to meet the requirement of a paperless form of procurement.

Read the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR)

used in Federal Government contracting and the clauses that are referenced. The FAR (<http://www.arnet.gov/>) is the primary regulation all Federal executive agencies follow when purchasing products and services. Each agency may supplement the FAR with its own policies and procedures.

Submit your online registrations (some were formerly called Bidders Mailing List Applications). The online registration for General Services Administration's Federal Business Opportunities is the FedBizOpps Vendor Notification Service. FedBizOpps (<http://fedbizopps.gov/>) notifies you electronically, by email, about the synopses and solicitations that are posted for classification codes you select. All Federal agencies are now required to use this system.

PRO-Net (<http://www.pro-net.sba.gov/>) the Small Business Administration (SBA) database of small businesses, provides easy access to your company's information by Government contracting personnel and prime contractors. It is important to link your home page to your data on PRO-Net. Prime contractors are requiring quick access to small businesses they want to contact for quotes.

The Department of Defense (DOD) and other Government agencies only conduct business with vendors registered on the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) (<http://www.ccr.gov/>). All Government agencies require vendors to be registered in the CCR.

Look for Business Opportunities on GSA's FedBizOpps

(<http://fedbizopps.gov/>), which is the official site for posting Federal and Military procurement opportunities over \$25,000, and on the DOD Internet site (<http://dodbusopps.com/>), which posts DOD's business opportunities. These resources provide online solicitations, Request for Proposals (RFP's) and Request for Quotations (RFQ's). Bidding documents can be downloaded (printed in hard copy form) from these Internet sites. Determine if there is a bid opening or bid closing date. Some solicitations are continuously open.

Before you bid, read the solicitation carefully to be sure your company can fill the requirements of the contract. Respond to all information requested in the solicitation. If help is needed, contact the Contracting Office identified in the solicitation.

Prepare and submit your bid/offer. Make certain that your submissions are current, complete and accurate. For FSS

multiple award schedule solicitations, GSAFSS may ask that your offer be based on your most favored customer's discounts, terms and conditions. If there is a bid opening or bid closing date, your response (bid or quote) must be sent to the appropriate address no later than the time of day stated in the solicitation. The government will evaluate your offer for responsiveness to the requirements of the solicitation and determine your responsibility (*i.e.*, ability and capacity to perform the requirements of the contract).

Use assistance available through SBA (<http://www.sba.gov/>). Regional or district offices, Small Business Development Centers (SBDC's) (<http://www.sba.gov/SBDC/>); Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) (<http://www.score.org/>); Business Information Centers (BICs) (<http://www.sba.gov/gopher/Local-Information/Business-Information-Centers/>); Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs) (<http://www.dla.mil/db/procurem.htm>); and GSA's SBTAs and Regional SBCUs, (see Chapter 7 or visit <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>) . These personnel will provide counseling on how to sell your products and services to the appropriate buying activities.

Search for subcontracting opportunities. The

Internet address for GSA's Subcontracting Directory is <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness> . The address for DOD's Subcontracting Directory is <http://www.acq.mil/sadbu/publications/subdir/index/htm>. Each directory lists prime contractors looking for small businesses that can help them meet their subcontracting goals.

SBA's SUB-Net (<http://www.sba.gov/subnet>) is a bulletin board where prime contractors can list products and services they are seeking from small businesses. SBA also maintains a Government-wide listing of prime contractors called the Subcontracting Opportunities Directory at <http://www.sba.gov/GC/sbsd.html>.

Focus your marketing efforts and identify appropriate buying activities by checking on past history of procurements for your products and services based on award data. The Federal Procurement Data Systems (<http://www.fpsc.gov/>) of GSA reports statistics on procurements of more than 60 Federal agencies. The GSA Schedule Sales Query (SSQ) enables you to easily access the sales reported by the GSA Schedule contractors. (Visit <http://ssq.fss.gsa.gov/>) PTACs can help you with your research.

By participating in small business activities such as procurement conferences, expos, seminars and networking events, you may obtain points of contact for contracting and subcontracting opportunities. Federal agencies, Congressional offices and State offices sponsor events where you can market your products and services to the government or attend workshop sessions on a variety of topics including marketing strategies.

Once you have a GSA contract, our Vendor Support Center is available to assist by telephone on (703) 305- 6235, toll free (877) 495-4849, by email at vendor.support@vsc.gsa.gov or online at <http://vsc.fss.gsa.gov/>.

Government purchase cards are the method of payment for micro-purchases and some simplified acquisitions. Small businesses compete with large businesses for micro-purchases (\$0-\$2,500), but simplified acquisitions (\$2,500-\$100,000) are set-aside for small businesses. If you are currently set up for your customers to use purchase cards, such as VISA or MasterCard, you should be able to accept government purchase cards.

Accept Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Payment by EFT ensures direct deposit to your bank account and allows the Federal Government to reduce the cost of preparing a paper check.

Is your company eligible for small business certification? See Chapter 1 or check SBA's home page at <http://www.sba.gov> for information on certification and the location of your closest SBA office.

Your business should include a healthy mixture of both government and private sector contracting. You should be selling to small and large businesses. Teaming and joint ventures can open the door to more and/or larger procurement opportunities. Remember: even when you are awarded a contract(s), you need to market, market, market your company!

Tips on Obtaining a GSA Schedules Contract

Review the FSS Contractor Guide (a step-by-step guide) at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/vendorguide/>.

Identify the GSA Schedule that covers your product or service. To do this, access the Schedules e-Library at: www.fss.gsa.gov/schedules. You can search by schedule, number, keyword or phrase to find a schedule match, or you can review the complete list of schedules. Determine the applicable GSA Acquisition Center that handles your product or service by visiting <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/> and click either "products" or "services". NOTE: If your business line is diverse and falls within several different GSA Schedules, you may wish to pursue the "Corporate Contracting" route.

This is a single award schedule contract that will cover the entire business line. The solicitation number for the Corporate Contracts is FCO-00-CORP-0000C.

Obtain a copy of the GSA Schedule solicitations for the product or service you want to offer to the government on the Internet at: <http://www.fedbizopps.gov/>. Click FBO for Vendors; select GSA Offices; select FSS Locations; select the appropriate acquisition center; then select posted dates or classification code (which is the schedule number you chose). Download and printout the latest solicitation with all related synopses, amendments and modifications. Most of the Schedules are continuously open.

Complete all information in the solicitation. Read the solicitation document thoroughly. If you have questions about the solicitation, you may contact the point of contact in the solicitation or an Acquisition Center representative. Some Acquisition Centers, offer workshops on "How to Prepare a Quality Offer". See the Events section on the OSBU homepage or contact the Acquisition Center for workshop information. Every State has a PTAC office that can provide assistance with completing the Schedules Contracts. Locate the PTAC in your state by visiting (<http://www.dla.mil/db/procurem.htm>). Before completing the solicitation, be sure you are financially sound. After you have completed the solicitation, review it carefully, and don't forget to sign and date your offer.

Be sure your offer complies with the "most favored customer" MAS policy applicable to all multiple award schedules. GSA expects to receive a discount equal to or better than your "most favored customer". You may even want to compare the prices that you are offering the government to those of your competitors to determine if your prices are comparable and reasonable. (Check GSA Advantage! on <http://www.gsaadvantage.gov/>, or existing schedules for current prices). Submit your offer with your current commercial pricelist, discount schedule, and if required by the solicitation, supply references from satisfied customers.

Obtain a past performance evaluation (PPE) report on your firm by Open Ratings, Inc. The form is available in most solicitations and should be faxed to Open Ratings at (781) 742-6707 or emailed to reports@openratings.com. In the event that you are unable to locate this order form, a copy can be obtained by contacting Open Ratings at (617) 232-9660 or Dun & Bradstreet at (703) 807-5062. It is requested that you provide 20 references to be surveyed to ensure the timely completion of your PPE. Initiating your report requires a minimum of six submitted references, three of which must be surveyed to complete the report. Questions regarding the PPE service may be directed to Open Ratings at (617) 232- 9660.

Submit your offer to the address listed in the solicitation. After your offer (with attachments) has been received in the acquisition center, a contracting officer will contact you to begin negotiations.

Be ready to negotiate your best offer. For more information on FSS activities, visit the FSS website at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/>; call (703) 305-6477 or 1-(888)-FSS- 0070 or write to the Federal Supply Service Information Center at GSA/FSS, Information Center (FMLI), 1941 Jefferson Davis Highway, Lobby Level Room 104, Washington, DC 20406.

The Office of Small Business Utilization conducts monthly briefings (and sometimes nationwide telecasts) on "How to Obtain a GSA Schedules Contract". View the homepage at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness> for information on upcoming sessions. Additionally, the Regional Small Business Utilization Centers are staffed with Specialists who provide current information, counseling services, and literature concerning the Schedules Program. Contact the Center in your area for information on Schedules orientation sessions; see Chapter 7.

Chapter 4

Marketing Tools for Small Businesses

Marketing and personal representation are the keys to your success as a supplier to GSA. A basic understanding of what GSA does, its organization and how to market to the agency will make it easier to identify and pursue contracting opportunities. Regional Small Business Utilization Centers (SBUCs) should be your first point of contact. Representatives will provide information to help you market to GSA contracting offices and take advantage of special marketing events sponsored by GSA. Request a copy of their Procurement Directory, if available, which contains a list of Federal Government offices located in the Region. Or visit <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>, and go to Procurement Directories. Find out which Federal agencies buy the products or services you provide; call or visit the offices, as appropriate. Provide each contracting office with brochures or other information describing your company and the products or services you offer. Below are marketing tools that will enhance your chance of attracting opportunities in this growing, competitive business world. The contacts and resources included in this section will help you get off to a good start in marketing to the Federal Government.

Focus your Marketing Efforts

Focus your marketing efforts on a few agencies that buy your product or service. Decide if you should target a particular business line or agency. Focus on agencies that have similar customer experience, and ensure that the agencies that you choose to market meet your company's long/short term goals. Identify prime contractors for possible subcontracting opportunities. The following references are available to assist you in your research to locate agencies that need and buy your product or service.

Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) Report

The FPDS report is published annually by the Federal Procurement Data Center. It contains information on contracting activities of all Federal agencies and provides information valuable for market and geographical analysis. The report identifies the type of products and services bought by the agencies along with prime contractors who receive the majority of the Federal contracts in each state. To access the most current copy of the Federal Procurement Report, visit <http://www.fpd.c.gov/>.

You may request special reports, which can help in tracking the demand for a specific type of product or service or the value and number of procurements by an individual agency or procurement office. A fee is charged for special reports. To obtain a special report, fax your request to (202) 219-3615 or call (202) 219-3416.

FirstGov

FirstGov is the first government website to provide easy, one-stop access to all online U.S. Federal Government resources with keyword search capability and featured subjects. Through FirstGov, agencies are making it easier for sellers to pursue Federal-buying opportunities. Agencies have taken significant steps that enable firms wanting to do business with the government to have one-stop access on the Internet to the information they need (namely notices and solicitations) to pursue Federal contracting opportunities over \$25,000. Visit the website at <http://www.firstgov.gov>.

GSA IT-Solutions Shop

To accommodate government procurement through its programs, IT-Solutions has developed an on-line, webbased purchase order system called IT-Solutions Shop (ITSS). IT-Solutions is part of the GSA Federal Technology Service (FTS) that is responsible for technical services, including programs like Federal Acquisition Services for Technology (FAST), and some ordering capability under Technical and Management Support (TMS) and Telecommunications Support Contract 2 (TSC2). It is designed to ease the development of delivery and purchase orders within FTS programs. ITSS accomplishes this by providing convenient access through the Internet to a central work environment where orders are submitted, processed and awarded. The system automatically posts and makes available all information, and notifies individuals when events requiring attention occur. Clients, contractors and individuals from the GSA are all able to share information and work simultaneously on-line in this completely integrated Internet environment. Furthermore, ITSS includes several security and support systems to make this environment secure and easy to use. For contractor registration and other information, visit <http://it-solutions.gsa.gov/>.

GSA's Schedules e-Library

The Schedules e-Library is the official and only on-line source for complete Schedules and contract award information. Information is updated daily to ensure access to the latest Schedules and contracts. You can find out which suppliers have a contract, and what is available by using various search options, *e.g.*, Schedule contractor's name, contract number, Special Item Number, Schedule Number or key word. The Schedules e-Library is a good source for teaming opportunities. The program uses the advances of electronic commerce to provide access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by visiting <http://www.gsaclibrary.gsa.gov/elib/eLibrary.jsp>.

SBA's PRO-Net

SBA's PRO-Net (Procurement Marketing and Access Network) is an electronic gateway of procurement information for and about small businesses. It is a search engine for contracting officers, a marketing tool for small firms and a "link" to procurement opportunities and important information. Participating firms can update their own profiles, link their companies "homepages" to their profile creating a very powerful marketing tool, and receive and ask questions about procurement opportunities. To determine if your company is eligible for participation in Federal procurement preference programs and take full advantage of the benefits, you must register on SBA's PRO-NET database of small businesses. You can become certified as a Section 8(a) firm, Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB), HUBZone business and become eligible for restricted competition contracts, non-competitive contracts, ten percent price preferences. To register, and learn more about PRO-Net, access the Internet site at <http://pro-net.sba.gov/>.

Central Contract Registration

The Central Contract Registration (CCR) is a central repository for vendor data. CCR is the primary vendor database for the Department of Defense (DOD) and other Federal Agencies. Current and potential government vendors are required to register in CCR in order to be eligible for contract awards and to receive payments for goods and services. This database can be accessed at <http://www.ccr.gov>.

In order for contractors to register in PRO-Net, they must first register in the CCR. SBA has partnered with DOD to integrate PRO-Net and the CCR system, thereby creating an integrated acquisition environment, *i.e.*:

- Single registration for vendors to provide Government procurement and invoice payment data
- Single source of vendor data for Government procurement and finance personnel
- Validated and standardized data throughout the acquisition process.

The PRO-Net system will continue to serve as a major marketing development tool for small businesses seeking to do business with the Federal Government and prime contractor. It will also continue to be an important marketing research tool for the Government contracting officers and commercial buyers seeking small business sources. Additionally, it will continue to be the authoritative source of certification information for 8(a) Business Development, HUBZone Empowerment Contracting Programs, and for Small Disadvantage Business status.

Seek GSA Contracting/Subcontracting Opportunities

Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities

This annual on-line document lists GSA's anticipated contracting opportunities for the current or upcoming fiscal year, giving prospective contractors enough lead time to develop marketing strategies, compile the necessary information and carefully prepare proposals. The Forecast is divided into several sections, following GSA's organizational lines. Within each section, contracting opportunities are listed by region and by type of goods or services required. GSA's OSBU compiles and maintains this document. It is at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>, look under Publications and click on Contracting Opportunities

GSA Subcontracting Directory

This is a listing of large companies who have contracts with GSA for goods or services worth \$500,000 or more (\$1 million or more for construction). Public Law 95-507 requires these contractors to have subcontracting plans that suggest the dollar value and the percentage of goods and services that may be supplied through subcontracts with small, small disadvantaged, women owned small, HUBZone small, veteran-owned small and service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. GSA lists these companies alphabetically by name within each of the 11 GSA regions. Each listing includes the company's name, the products or services for which it subcontracts, its address and the name and telephone number of the firm's small business liaison to whom you may market your product or service. This information is accessible at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>, look under Publications, and click on Subcontracting Directory.

SBA's SUBNet

SUBNet (see <http://web.sba.gov/subnet/>) is the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA's) Subcontracting Network. Prime contractors use SUBNet to post subcontracting opportunities. These may or may not be reserved for small business, and they may include either solicitations or other notices. Small businesses can review this website to identify opportunities in their areas of expertise. While the website is designed primarily as a place for large businesses to post solicitations and notices, Federal agencies, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, colleges, universities and foreign governments use it for the same purpose. This website is one that is focused so that, small businesses can use their resources to identify concrete, tangible opportunities and then bid on them.

Participate in Small Business Activities

Attend Procurement Conferences, Networking Sessions and Other Marketing Events

GSA, along with other Federal agencies and Congressional and State offices, provides opportunities where you can market your product or service to the Federal Government. These opportunities include networking breakfasts, power lunches, procurement conferences, seminars and trade fairs.

Some SBUCs sponsor monthly breakfast or luncheon networking sessions. During these sessions, business owners and marketing representatives meet GSA contracting personnel and network among themselves. Additionally, SBUCs conduct procurement networking sessions centered on major GSA acquisitions that permit the small business community to meet potential prime contractors and discuss teaming arrangements and subcontracting opportunities.

To increase contracting opportunities for small businesses, GSA and other agencies frequently cosponsor procurement conferences. To help their constituents sell to Federal agencies, the offices of United States Senators and Representatives also publicize and sponsor procurement conferences. Typical workshop sessions at conferences are about marketing strategies, bid preparation and identifying subcontracting opportunities.

Some state and local agencies usually sponsor seminars and trade fairs. At these marketing events, contracting officers from GSA and other Federal agencies often make presentations and appear on panels. The local press and business publications typically publicize seminars and trade fairs. Some marketing events require a small fee; others are free. In both cases, they are valuable resources for vendors who want to sell products and services to GSA and other Federal agencies.

For information about upcoming events in your area, contact the Office of Small Business Utilization (OSBU), your Regional Small Business Utilization Center (Chapter 7), or visit <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>.

GSA's Products and Services Exposition

GSA's Expos are the Government's premier trade show, providing opportunities to see many new products and services. Attend informative training seminars, innovative exhibits, and network with hundreds of GSA vendors. Attendees are from Federal agencies and Military installations worldwide. For more information on GSA Expos, visit <http://www.expo.gsa.gov>.

Small Business Organizations and Trade

Associations

Seek out and gain benefits from small business organizations such as Small Business Development Centers, Minority Business Development Centers, Women-owned Business Development Centers, Native American Business Development Centers, trade associations, professional development seminars/workshops and other resources that offer an array of services. Membership in trade associations provides opportunities for networking, training, encouragement, and direct guidance to expand professional development. Companies may also advertise their product or service in trade association magazines and journals, *i.e.*, National Contract Management Association at <http://www.ncmahq.org/> and National Institute of Governmental Purchasing at <http://www.nigp.org/>. A current list of over 3,700 Outside Resources & Great Business Hotlinks are listed on the SBA website at <http://www.sba.gov/hotlist>

Use Existing Resources

FedBizOpps

GSA's Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps) (<http://www.fedbizopps.gov/>) has been designated as the single point of entry for vendors to search Federal Government procurement opportunities that exceed \$25,000. FedBizOpps provides access to agency business opportunities 24 hours per day, seven days a week, and allows you to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities for your supply or service. It provides easy access to: synopses, pre-solicitation notices, solicitations, request for proposals, request for quotations, federal acquisition regulations, market surveys, sources sought, amendments/modifications and awards. It also permits downloading (printing) of documents. In the future, FedBizOpps will be expanded to include the electronic receipt of bids, proposals and quotes.

FedBizOpps is GSA's primary vehicle for disseminating written solicitations. GSA intends that FedBizOpps will substitute for, not supplement, paper copies of solicitations. However, web-based transactions are not practical in some industries or in some geographic areas. If the contracting officer believes that the distribution of paper copies is necessary to ensure adequate competition, then paper copies will be distributed. For more information and registration, see <http://www.fedbizopps.gov/>.

Pricelist/Marketing Brochures

GSA provides each Schedule contract holder with a list of potential customer agencies who buy products and services

using the particular schedule. GSA will also either provide printed labels or a disk for the contractor's use in sending copies of price lists and marketing brochures to the customer agencies.

Consider Other Resources

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The new Internet version of the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (<http://www.cfda.gov/>) makes it easier to find information on the more than 1,400 Federal assistance programs, both financial and non-financial including grants, loans, loan guarantees, scholarships, mortgage loans, insurance and other forms of assistance. Information for this catalog is updated and published each year.

Contractor Team Arrangements

Contractor team arrangements are an excellent source of quality service. The following is an example of team arrangements: team arrangements are created when two or more GSA Schedule contractors join together to provide a total solution to meet agency needs. Contractor team arrangements allow Schedule contractors to deliver an end-to-end solution from multiple industries. Such arrangements enhance the ability of small business concerns to participate. For guidance on contractor team arrangements, visit the FSS Contractor Guide at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/contractorguide>.

FSS Contractor Guide

The Contractor Guide is an electronic document available to the general public 24 hours a day, seven days a week, free of charge. It contains information on policies, procedures and regulations and is meant to promote awareness within industry. It also contains an overview of the Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) Program and information on the MAS process. Additional links are provided on a variety of websites, as well as information on additional resources. Visit the FSS Contractor Guide at <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/contractorguide>.

GSA Advantage!

The GSA Advantage! on-line shopping service is an Internet acquisition solution for the entire Federal Government. It allows agencies to search through all GSA sources of supply and select the item that is the best value for their requirements. Through the Internet, Federal agencies have the capability to order directly from the desktop PC. GSA Advantage! is a fast and convenient shopping system that is quickly becoming the hottest shopping website in the Government. This shopping system allows Federal agencies to browse or search for products and services using key words, national stock numbers and vendor names; compare features, prices and delivery options; and place orders electronically. Through GSA Advantage!, customers will be able to search for and order products quickly and conveniently, increasing the potential for strong sales. You may wish to browse GSA Advantage! to review current contractors and their pricing. In order to do so, just follow the instructions on the sign-in page. You will not need a Government-wide commercial purchase card to browse. Another benefit of GSA Advantage! to your company is that purchase orders can be submitted to you via electronic data interchange (EDI), resulting in faster order payment. For additional information on GSA Advantage!, visit <http://www.gsaadvantage.gov/>.

Government-wide Commercial Purchase Card

GSA requires Schedule contractors to accept the Government-wide commercial purchase card for orders at or below the micro-purchase threshold of \$2,500. However, the Schedule contractors are encouraged to accept the purchase card for all orders, since more and more Schedule customers recognize the administrative and cost-saving features of the purchase card. The Federal Government purchase card program is known as "GSA SmartPay. If your company already accepts credit cards, no additional steps are necessary. If not, contact a local bank or a GSA SmartPay contractor (Citibank, Bank One, Bank of America, Mellon Bank and U.S. Bank). GSA SmartPay information is available from GSA at <http://pub.fss.gsa.gov/services/gasmpay/>

GSA's *MarkeTips* Advertising

Contractors are invited to prepare an article for GSA's *MarkeTips* publication advertising their new award. *MarkeTips* is a GSA supply catalog and schedules supplement highlighting pertinent procurement, supply, property management, travel, transportation and environmental information directed to Federal users of the GSA supply system. This publication is used by each Federal agency. The e-mail address for information regarding advertisements in *MarkeTips* is gsa.marketips@gsa.gov. To view a copy, visit <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/pub/>.

Selling to the Federal Government

A step-by-step guide to the world of Federal contracting is available to assist women entrepreneurs in overcoming the barriers that may be limiting their success in procurement. Written by a taskforce of Women-owned Business Advocates and SBA's Office of Government Contracting, the guide is full of useful information that provides a comprehensive overview of Federal contracting. The guide is available at <http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness/selling.html>.

WomenBiz.gov

WomenBiz.gov is the gateway for women-owned businesses selling to the government. There are thousands of business and contracting references, resources and Federal procurement Internet sites available. SBA's newly established Office of Federal Contract Assistance for Women Business Owners plays a key role in consolidating this vast amount of information into a coordinated and focused gateway for women-owned businesses interested in selling to the Federal Government. The WomenBiz.gov website consolidates small business registries; provides information on agencies' prime contracting and subcontracting; provides agencies procurement forecasts, best practices, acquisition news, calendars of events; and provides information on mentor-protégé programs. Visit the website at <http://www.WomenBiz.gov>.

Chapter 5

Electronic Commerce (EC)

Electronic commerce (EC) means electronic techniques for accomplishing business transactions, including electronic mail or messaging, World Wide Web technology, electronic bulletin boards, purchase cards, electronic funds transfers and electronic data interchange. In addition to the many electronic marketing tools described in Chapter 4, such as FedBizOpps and the IT-Solutions Shop, GSA also uses Electronic Data Interchange, Electronic Funds Transfers and the Federal Acquisition Computer Network (FACNET).

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Driven by the need to produce better, faster and cost effective results, GSA has jumped into the world of electronic commerce and the use of EDI. Currently in the agency, many of our Federal Supply Service vendors present their invoices through a standard electronic invoice format referred to as an "810". This method of invoicing allows the vendor and the Government the opportunity to conduct business without a paper invoice. Vendors contracting with FSS may also use EDI to streamline and speed up the flow of paperwork for purchase orders and other documents. The basic elements of an EDI program are a personal computer; a modem, communication and translation software; an electronic mailbox; and a value added network. The Federal Supply Service's EDI system is a computer-to-computer exchange of business documents that lets you do in minutes what otherwise might take days to accomplish. It reduces time spent in preparation, editing and mailing of forms, invoices and other paperwork, while cutting costs for paper, postage and clerical help. EDI also gives you greater flexibility in information use, storage and retrieval. A potential contractor, wishing to do business with the Federal Government and all Branches of the Military using EDI, must first provide registration information to the Central Contractor Registration (CCR), visit <http://www.ccr.gov/>.

Sources of Information on EC/EDI

Data Interchange Standards Association (DISA)

The Data Interchange Standards Association (DISA), a not-for-profit organization, is home for the development of cross-industry EDI standards that provide the foundation to enable individuals, companies and organizations to participate in global e-business. DISA provides technical and administrative support through its affiliate service division, to major e-commerce, standards and Extensible Markup Language (XML) specification development organizations. DISA hosts events focused on e-commerce issues, challenges and standards, as well as seminars and training on EDI and XML, Internet security and much more. DISA also publishes implementation guides and e-commerce standards, and hosts standards-setting and networking forums. Visit the website at <http://www.disa.org>.

Egov.gov Web Site

The Office of Electronic Government has launched a Web Site that reflects the rapid change in public awareness and explosive growth in public demand for on-line services. Egov.gov supports the goal of using technology to deliver information and government services to citizens, business partners, public employees and other government organizations. The site offers information and links to several e-government initiatives, including work in advancing XML standards, Federal Public Key Infrastructure Projects, creation of crossagency web portals and many others. Bi-weekly, E-Government news items are posted. Visit the site at <http://egov.gov>.

Electronic Funds Transfer

Most of the vendors who deal with GSA are currently offered three payment options: purchase card, Treasury check, and electronic funds transfer (EFT). Over the years, we have found that many vendors prefer EFT to the other methods. Not only does this ensure direct deposit to the vendor's bank account, it allows for much better cash management for the vendor. This method is not only a winner for the vendor; it is also a big winner for the Federal Government by reducing the cost of preparing a paper check as well as its postage and handling.

Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996

The Debt Collection Improvement Act of 1996 mandates the use of electronic funds transfer (EFT) for all Federal payments to recipients eligible to receive such payments, effective July 26, 1996. The only exception was for those who certified in writing that they did not have an account at a financial institution. On January 1, 1999, EFT became mandatory for all Federal payments. The Act also requires each Federal agency to obtain a taxpayer identification number (TIN) from each person and/or entity doing business with the agency. In order to comply with this requirement, GSA will request the TIN and banking data to comply with the mandatory EFT requirements from all entities where they are missing.

Federal Acquisition Computer Network (FACNET)

FACNET is architecture used by contracting offices for acquisition of products and services between the micropurchase and simplified acquisition thresholds (see Chapter 6); it is based on EDI technology. Use of FACNET was mandated by the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994 and later repealed by the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 1998, Section 850. The current mandate is for agencies to consider use of existing technology, including FACNET, before implementing new electronic commerce systems.

GSA contracts for products and services through various procurement methods including simplified acquisition, sealed bidding and negotiation. In determining the procurement method to be used, a contracting officer takes into consideration Federal and GSA rules and other requirements. This chapter provides information on the Federal and GSA rules that govern contracting decisions, general contracting requirements and specifications. It also discusses procedures for, and applications of, the different procurement methods.

Procurement Regulations

GSA purchasing procedures are governed primarily by two sets of regulations: the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and the General Services Administration Acquisition Manual (GSAM), which consolidates the GSA agency acquisition regulations and policy guidance.

Federal Acquisition Regulations

The FAR is the primary regulation GSA and all Federal executive agencies follow when they purchase products and services by contract with appropriated funds. This regulation contains uniform procedures governing acquisitions through purchase or lease. The regulation implements the numerous laws that have been enacted to govern Federal procurement.

The FAR is published as Chapter 1 of Title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and is available for reference in most central libraries. The FAR is published in a loose-leaf edition, in a bound volume edition, on CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read Only Memory), and is available electronically on the Acquisition Network - AcqNet at <http://www.arnet.gov>. AcqNet is probably the most comprehensive of the websites that provide access to Federal procurement documents and information on current procurement initiatives throughout the Government.

You can purchase loose-leaf versions with periodic updates and bound volumes of the FAR from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, DC 20402, and through GPO bookstores in several locations around the country; to locate the bookstore nearest you, visit <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/locations/index.html>.

General Services Administration Acquisition Manual

GSA has supplemented the FAR with its own regulations, policies and procedures in the GSAM. The GSA regulations appear in Chapter 5 of Title 48, CFR, while the GSAM contains both the GSA regulations and policy guidance. The GSAM is available at <http://www.arnet.gov/GSAM/gsam.html>. Bound copies of the GSAM may be purchased from GPO; the CFR and GSAM can be retrieved from the GPO website at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/.

The Federal Register publishes amendments to both the FAR and the GSAM. You can access FAR amendments on the Internet at <http://www.arnet.gov/far>.

General Contracting Requirements

No matter what GSA is buying or which regulations govern the purchases, certain aspects of purchases are similar. That's because all of our regulations have a common basis in law. Some of the important similarities are discussed in this section.

Publicizing Procurements

Contracting officers must publicize procurements in order to: (1) increase competition; (2) broaden industry participation in meeting Government requirements; and (3) assist small businesses in obtaining contracts and subcontracts, (see FAR 48 CFR 5.002). GSA uses FedBizOpps to announce GSA procurements over \$25,000. You can find solicitations between \$10,000 and \$25,000 displayed in a public place in the respective contracting offices. In some Regions, solicitations for products and services worth over \$10,000 are displayed in the Regional SBUC. Certain procurements require no publication. These exceptions, listed in FAR 5.202(a), include:

- Situations that would compromise national security
- Statutory authority (*e.g.*, 8(a) contracts)
- Utility services (other than telecommunication services) and only one source is available
- Orders under indefinite delivery contracts
- Acceptance of a proposal under the Small Business Innovation Development Act
- Certain unsolicited research proposals
- Perishable subsistence supplies where advance notice is not reasonable
- Where action is under the terms of an existing previously synopsisized contract

Competition

Federal procurement laws require that agencies conduct acquisitions on the basis of full and open competition to the maximum extent practicable to obtain products and services economically and efficiently. Full and open competition is not required for procurements that fall under certain statutory exceptions, which are spelled out in FAR 6.302. For example, these exceptions cover such situations as emergencies, international agreements, national security and certain products and services for which sources of supply are limited. Also, the requirements for competition vary under "simplified acquisition procedures" (acquisitions for \$100,000 or below in value), which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Contractor Qualifications

GSA can enter into contracts only with "responsible" contractors, (see FAR 9.1). To be considered "responsible," a contractor must have adequate financial resources to perform the contract, be able to comply with the delivery or performance schedule, have a satisfactory record of past performance and integrity, and have the necessary skills and facilities to perform the needed work, (see FAR 9.104-1). For larger contracts, GSA may request that the vendor submit information (*e.g.*, financial data and personnel information) to use in making the determination. In some instances, it may be necessary to conduct a pre-award survey; this is an evaluation of the vendor's ability to meet the responsibility factors.

The FAR requires that the contracting officer make a determination of responsibility, (see FAR 9.103(b)). In the absence of information clearly indicating that the prospective contractor is responsible, the contracting officer shall make a determination of nonresponsibility, (see FAR 9.103(b)). If the prospective contractor is a small business concern, the contracting officer shall comply with FAR 19.6, Certificates of Competency and Determinations of Responsibility. For small businesses, a determination of nonresponsibility must be referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA), with certain exceptions (see FAR 19.602-1).

Types of Contracts

Contracts are generally grouped into two broad categories: fixed-price contracts and cost reimbursement contracts, (see FAR 16.101(b)). Variations on these two broad categories range from firm-fixed-price in which the contractor has full responsibility for the performance costs and resulting profit (or loss), to cost-plus-fixed-fee, in which the contractor has

minimal responsibility for the performance costs and the negotiated fee (profit) is fixed (see FAR 16.101(b)). In between are the various incentive contracts in which the contractor's responsibility for the performance costs and the profit or fee incentives are tailored to the uncertainties involved in contract performance. Contract types are discussed in detail in FAR, Part 16.

A wide selection of contract types is available to the Government and contractors in order to provide needed flexibility in acquiring the large variety and volume of supplies and services needed by agencies, (see FAR 16.101). For example, in addition to other contract types, many GSA offices awards indefinite-delivery, indefinite quantity contracts, which are fixed-price contracts with economic price adjustments, (see FAR Part 8.4). FSS and FTS also award task and delivery order contracts in accordance with FAR 16.5.

Metric Conversion

The Metric Conversion Act of 1975, as amended by the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988, designates the metric system of measurement (meters, grams, liters and degrees Celsius) as the preferred system of weights and measures for United States trade and commerce. It also requires that each agency use the metric system of measurement in its acquisitions, unless such use is impractical or likely to cause significant inefficiencies or loss of markets to United States firms. GSA has converted the English measurements to the metric system in most Federal standards, specifications and commercial item descriptions.

GSA's Construction Metrication Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring that GSA is implementing the metric system of measurement in an efficient manner while ensuring that the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 are observed. The Ombudsman also responds to comments from prospective bidders, subcontractors and suppliers related to guidance on the use of the metric system of measurement in contracts for the construction of Federal buildings and for services and materials used in these contracts. You may contact the Construction Metrication Ombudsman at GSA's Office of Acquisition Policy (MV), Room 4040, 1800 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20405.

Specifications, Standards and Commercial Item Descriptions

Specifications and commercial item descriptions are often used to describe products purchased by the Government. The products may be specified in terms of performance requirements, design characteristics or both. These documents inform offerors of the requirements they must satisfy for the products and/or services being acquired under the solicitation. GSA's policy is becoming more oriented toward performance-based contracting which emphasizes that all aspects of an acquisition should be structured around the purpose of the work to be performed as opposed to the manner in which the work is to be performed. In certain solicitations, GSA references specifications and standards developed by nationally and internationally recognized technical societies, associations and laboratories when the requirement involves precise measurements. GSA invites these organizations, as well as individual manufacturers and users, to comment on proposed specifications.

Federal Specifications

Federal specifications are generally used only to describe Government-unique products or those, which for reasons of health, safety or interface requirements, must be described in detail or subjected to extensive testing.

Standards

Federal standards establish engineering and technical requirements for processes, procedures, practices and methods that have been adopted as standard. They may also establish requirements for selection, application and design criteria for material. Examples include test methods, standards for terminology and sampling procedures.

Electronic and Information Technology

Accessibility Standards

In August 1998, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (found at 29 U.S.C. 794d) was amended to require that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained or used by Federal agencies, including the U.S. Postal Service, be accessible to people with disabilities. This amendment significantly expands and strengthens the technology access requirements in Section 508 by creating binding, enforceable standards and incorporating those standards into the FAR, (see FAR 39.2).

Federal agencies must now use these standards in all their electronic and information technology acquisitions. See <http://www.accessboard.gov/sec508/508standards.htm>.

Commercial Item Descriptions

GSA's policy is becoming more oriented toward the purchase of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) type supplies and services. Commercial item descriptions are simplified documents that describe the type of product or service to be acquired and explain how the agency intends to use the product or service in terms of function to be performed,

performance requirement or essential physical characteristics, (see FAR 12.202(b)).

Simplified Acquisition Purchases

The term "simplified acquisition" has replaced the term "small purchase," and the threshold has been increased to \$100,000. The FAR permits the use of simplified acquisition procedures up to \$5 million for commercial item acquisitions, (see FAR 13.003(c)). Each acquisition of supplies or services that have an anticipated dollar value exceeding \$2,500 and not exceeding \$100,000 are usually reserved exclusively for small businesses, (see FAR 13.003(b)(1)).

For small businesses interested in purchases under \$100,000, many procurement opportunities exist. Each year, the Federal Government buys billions of dollars worth of products and services using simplified acquisition procedures. Purchases by agencies under GSA contracts account for hundreds of millions of dollars of that total.

Simplified acquisition procedures may be used for the purchase of products, services or construction. Making and paying for purchases can be accomplished with purchase orders, cash, a Government-wide commercial purchase card or blanket purchase agreements.

Price and other information for simplified acquisitions may be obtained through "quotations", (see FAR 13.004). Quotations are not offers and, consequently, cannot be accepted by the Government to form a binding contract. Therefore, issuance by the Government of an order in response to a supplier's quotation does not establish a contract. The order is an offer by the Government to the supplier to buy certain supplies or services upon specified terms and conditions. A contract is established when the supplier accepts the offer, (see FAR 13.004(a)).

Not all purchases under \$100,000 are simplified acquisitions. GSA sometimes uses sealed bidding or competitive negotiation procedures (discussed later in this chapter) for procurements under the simplified acquisition threshold. As the procurement regulations vary depending on the type of procurement, it is important to have a clear understanding of the type of procurement being conducted.

Simplified Acquisitions Reserved for Small Businesses

Most simplified acquisitions are reserved for small businesses and are awarded under a procedure called "set-asides for small businesses". Your company may qualify as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field and qualifies under size and other criteria, (see FAR 19.001). You may find the size eligibility criteria in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Title 13, Part 121, as amended. SBA has sole responsibility for "size determinations".

Where GSA Makes Purchases

In most purchases using simplified acquisition procedures, GSA buys from small businesses located close to where the product or service is needed. Depending on the product or service and which GSA organization is involved, actual contracting may be performed at local, Regional or GSA Central Office, for example:

- GSA's Public Buildings Service (PBS) procures buildings services through its nationwide network of Property Management Centers, but handles simplified lease acquisitions through its Regional leasing offices.
- The Federal Supply Service (FSS) buys most common-use products and services centrally through its Acquisition Centers.

Contract Evaluation and Award Requirements

No matter what the dollar amount of a purchase, the price must be reasonable in order for the purchase or contract award to be made, (see FAR 13.106-3(a)). With respect to simplified acquisitions, the FAR states that whenever possible, price reasonableness is based on competitive quotations or offers or other factors as appropriate, (see FAR 13.106-3(a)(1)).

In simplified acquisitions, the contracting officer has broad discretion in fashioning suitable evaluation procedures, provided that quotations or offers are evaluated in an impartial manner and inclusive of transportation charges, are evaluated on the basis established in the solicitation (if issued), and provided that all quotations or offers are considered, (see FAR 13.106-2). Price or cost to the Government must be evaluated in every procurement. (41 U.S.C. 253a(c)(1)(B)). Factors other than cost or price may also be used in evaluations (*e.g.*, technical factors, past performance). When soliciting quotations or offers, the contracting officer is required to notify potential offerors of the basis on which award will be made (price alone or price and other factors), (see FAR 13.106-1(a)(2)).

Unless the contract action under the simplified acquisition procedure requires synopsis pursuant to FAR 5.101 (and an

exception under 5.202 is not applicable), contracting officers must consider solicitation of at least three sources to promote competition to the maximum extent practical. The exception involves micro-purchases (purchases for \$2,500 or less), which are governed by different procedures, (see FAR 13.104(b)).

Purchases Under \$2,500

Purchases at or below the micro-purchase threshold (currently \$2,500) may be conducted using any of the methods described in FAR 13.3 (*e.g.*, Government wide commercial purchase card) provided the purchaser is authorized and trained, in agency procedures to use those methods, (see FAR 13.201(c)). Micro-purchases are unique in that they may be awarded without soliciting competitive quotations if the contracting officer or individual appointed in accordance with FAR 1.603-3(b) considers the price to be reasonable, (see FAR 13.202(a)(2)). To the extent practicable, the micropurchases shall be distributed equitably among qualified suppliers, (see FAR 13.202(a)).

Accepting a Government-wide commercial purchase card simplifies the payment process. Vendors are paid earlier than other payment options. The Government-wide commercial purchase card contractor provides payment and the vendor does not have to prepare a paper invoice.

GSA now requires GSA Schedule contractors to accept the Government-wide commercial purchase card for orders at or below the micro-purchase threshold (\$2,500).

Purchases Between \$2,500 and \$25,000

Purchases of \$2,500 to \$25,000 generally are handled in one of two ways:

- Oral quotations: The contracting office may solicit oral quotations from potential suppliers.
- Written quotations: The contracting office normally solicits written quotations through Standard Form 18 (Request for Quotation). This procedure is generally used if unusual specifications or a large number of different items are involved or if oral quotes are otherwise impractical.

Purchases Between \$2,500 and \$100,000

Purchases that have an anticipated dollar value exceeding \$2,500, but not over \$100,000, are automatically reserved exclusively for small businesses. This does not apply if the contracting officer determines there is no reasonable expectation of obtaining offers from two or more responsible small businesses that are competitive in terms of market prices, quality and delivery, (see FAR 19.502- 2(a)).

Purchase Orders

Purchase orders are often used for simplified acquisitions. A purchase order is an offer from the Government to buy something from a vendor, typically in response to an oral or written quotation. A contract is established when the supplier accepts the offer, (see FAR 13.004(a)).

The purchase order spells out everything the Government and the vendor must know to complete a transaction. This includes the quantity of products or scope of services required, their prices, when and where they are to be delivered, the originating and billing offices, contract and acquisition numbers, and other relevant information, (see FAR 13.302- 1). Many agencies, including GSA, are now preparing to solicit quotations and issue purchase orders through electronic data interchange (EDI), see Chapter 5.

Blanket Purchase Agreement

A blanket purchase agreement (BPA) is a simplified method of filling anticipated repetitive needs for supplies or services by establishing "charge accounts" with qualified sources of supply, (see FAR 16.7). The existence of a BPA does not justify purchasing from only one source or avoiding small business set-asides. The requirements of FAR 13.003 and 19.5 must be complied with. This procedure cuts down on paperwork and speeds up procurement. A contracting officer usually issues BPAs to a number of different suppliers for the same types of products or services. This gives the Government greater flexibility and choice in making their purchases.

Sealed-Bid Purchasing

Sealed bidding requires that award is made (without discussion), to that responsive bidder whose bid, conforming to the invitation for bids, will be the most advantageous to the Government, considering only price and the price-related factors included in the invitation. There are strict rules that the bidder and the contracting officer must follow before a contract can be awarded under sealed bid procedures, (see FAR part 14).

Solicitation of Sealed-Bids

When participating in sealed bidding, you will be relying largely on information supplied in the solicitation, called an

invitation for bids (IFB), and in documents cited in the IFB. You will need to review this information carefully to make sure your price is competitive with other bids and profitable for you.

Because it covers everything a vendor must know to fulfill a contract, an IFB can be a sizable document. It is divided into sections and subsections and has a transmittal sheet and a table of contents. The transmittal sheet generally gives the solicitation number, the products or services to be acquired, the contract period, items affected by set-asides (see Chapter 1) and other key information about the requirement. You should remove this sheet before submitting your bid, unless otherwise instructed. The IFB itself consists of sections, as outlined in the uniform contract format or the simplified contract format, see FAR 14.201 for a detailed explanation of the sections of the IFB.

Requesting an Invitation for Bid (IFB)

To learn about upcoming IFB's, check the GSA FedBizOpps System, (<http://www.fedbizopps.gov/>) which provides vendors access to agency business opportunities and publishes all Government requirements over \$25,000.

Preparing Your Bid

Responding to an IFB can require considerable time and effort. If the bid is not filled out and signed appropriately, it may be rejected. To be considered for award, a bid must comply with all material aspects of the IFB. Bidders are responsible for submitting bids, and any modifications or withdrawals in accordance with the requirements spelled out in the IFB, review FAR 14.3. Following are some pointers that can help you prepare your bid thoroughly, efficiently and on time.

Give Yourself Enough Time

Start working on your bid as soon as you receive an IFB, and allow extra time for unanticipated but essential consultation, checking and rechecking. This is particularly important if the contract is large or if you must obtain and read several documents before making a bid.

Even if everything goes smoothly, and you finish sooner than expected, you will need time to thoroughly review and, if necessary, revise your bid.

Be Sure You Understand the IFB

Read the IFB carefully; to make a realistic bid and fulfill the contract to the mutual benefit of you and GSA, you must understand all instructions, clauses, specifications and related documents. If you are in doubt about the meaning of any part of a solicitation, make no assumptions. Ask the contracting officer or other person named in the solicitation.

Obtain the Necessary Related Documents

The solicitation package should indicate where to obtain all essential specifications, standards and other documents cited in the solicitation. If not, ask the contracting officer how to acquire the documents. Bidders must meet the requirements of all documents cited.

Develop a Work Plan and Delivery Schedule

By developing a work plan and schedule at this stage, you can better calculate the time and material costs of fulfilling the contract; you will need this information to determine your bid price. Also, some IFB's require a schedule of work as part of the bid. Note the distances to the locations where you will be shipping products, and be sure you are able to meet the delivery schedule your bid promises.

Determine Costs

After using your work plan and schedule to arrive at a preliminary cost estimate, review the estimate to be sure it reflects other important cost factors. What are the market forecasts for the period when you will be supplying goods or services? Are the costs of raw materials and/or labor rising? Do you expect transportation costs to remain stable?

Most IFB's give you an opportunity to offer a discount for prompt payment. Decide whether you can afford to make such a discount as part of your bid.

Compile Other Information Requested in the IFB

Some IFB's will require information about your firm's financial stability and relevant experience. Make sure that any information you supply meets the requirements and is complete and accurate.

Review Your Bid

After you have prepared your bid, review it for clarity, consistency and accuracy. Compare your work plan, budget and schedule to be sure they are in agreement. For example, if your plan indicates that it will take 20 days to complete a

task, your budget and schedule should reflect this level of effort. Double check cost figures and computations, and make sure nothing has been left out.

Sealed-Bid Checklist

- Do you understand all requirements of the basic specification and all other specifications, documents and attachments to the IFB?
- Have you read all materials referred to but not included with the IFB?
- Have you rechecked your answers, your math and your price quotes to make sure they are accurate and complete?
- Have you verified unit prices and inserted them in the proper places?
- Are you confident that you can meet all contract requirements (such as materials used, manufacturing procedures, quality levels, testing and packaging)? And is your bid price high enough so you can meet these requirements and make a reasonable profit?
- Have you answered every question fully and accurately and supplied all information requested?
- Have you refrained from qualifying your bid either by insertions on the bid or in an accompanying letter? Additions of unwanted part numbers, exceptions to items and conditions of the IFB or inclusion of any type of contingency statement could result in your bid being declared nonresponsive.
- Have you signed and dated the IFB in all sections where required, including all certifications that apply to your business? Remember that a letter of transmittal isn't necessary: proper and accurate completion of the forms provided is all that is necessary.
- Have you properly acknowledged, signed and returned to the purchasing office all amendments to the IFB?
- Have you included a bid guarantee, if required by the IFB? Is the bid guarantee properly executed and in the proper amount?
- Have you correctly addressed the envelope containing your bid to the receiving office listed in the IFB?
- Have you allowed enough time for the bid to reach the receiving office before the posted deadline? (see the rules for delivery of bids).
- Have you placed sufficient postage and the sealed bid label (Optional Form 17) on the envelope used for returning your bid?
- If you plan to have the bid hand delivered, do you have the room number and other information necessary to get the bid to the right place before the time set for the bid opening?
- Do you have at least one file copy of the final version of your bid?
- Have you retained your original worksheet used in preparing your bid?

Submitting Your Bid

When you are ready to submit your bid, review the submission instructions, including envelope labeling. Double check the address where the bid is to be sent, and allow enough time to meet the deadline. Any bid received at the Government office designated in the IFB after the exact time specified for receipt of bids is "late". A late bid will not be considered unless it is received before award is made, the contracting officer determines that accepting the late bid would not unduly delay the acquisition; and the late bid meets one of the conditions specified in FAR 14.304(b). If you are having the bid hand delivered, make sure you have the right room number and meet any other special requirements for hand delivery. As Government offices typically follow security procedures for the delivery of letters and packages, you will need to ensure that you have factored in the additional time that will be needed for these security procedures when delivering the bid. Also, remember to place the sealed bid label (Optional Form 17) on the outer envelope. The label, which is provided with the solicitation, helps to ensure expeditious handling of your bid. Bids may be modified or withdrawn by any method authorized in the IFB, if notice is received in the office designated in the IFB not later than the exact time set for opening of bids, (see FAR 14.303(a)). However, once the bids have been opened, the contracting officer may allow withdrawal or correction of bids in accordance with the conditions specified in FAR 14.407.

Bid Opening and Contract Award

All bids in response to an IFB are kept unopened in a locked bid box in the Regional Bid Room where the contract award is to be made. Information about the number of bids and the bidders' identification is available only to Government associates with a "need to know".

At the time set for opening, a contracting official at the award site announces that the time has arrived. He or she opens the bids, reads the bids aloud and records them. Interested persons may examine the bids at this time, but will not be given access to financial or other proprietary information of the bidders.

After the bids have been opened, award is made to that responsible bidder whose bid, conforming to the invitation, will

be most advantageous to the Government, considering only price and the price-related factors included in the invitation, (see FAR 14.408).

Responsive and Responsible Bidders

The low bidder in a sealed-bid solicitation has two final hurdles to clear before receiving a contract award. These are the “responsive” and “responsible” bidder requirements. If the contract is uncomplicated, these determinations may be made shortly after the time the bids are opened. Contracts involving a number of products or services may require further evaluation before they can be awarded.

“Responsive” means that the bid was submitted on time and prepared according to the instructions and requirements of the IFB. Problems that would cause a bid to be judged non-responsive are listed in the FAR at 14.404-2. They include (but are not limited to):

- Failure to conform to the essential requirements of the IFB, such as specifications, delivery schedule or permissible substitutions.
- Conditions imposed by a bidder that would modify requirements of the IFB or limit the bidder’s liability to the Government, since to allow the bidder to impose such conditions would give the bidder an advantage over, and be prejudicial to, other bidders. For example, a bid accompanied by a notice that a product is subject to prior sale or that prices are subject to change without notice will be rejected as nonresponsive. Bids that don’t specify a definite price will also be rejected.
- Changing the minimum bid acceptance period to a shorter period of time than that required by the Government to evaluate and award the procurement.

GSA can enter into contracts only with “responsible” contractors, (see FAR 9.1). To be considered “responsible,” a contractor must have adequate financial resources to perform the contract, be able to comply with the delivery or performance schedule, have a satisfactory record of past performance and integrity and have the necessary skills and facilities to perform the needed work, (see FAR 9.104-1). For larger contracts, GSA may request that the vendor submit information (*e.g.*, financial data and personnel information) to use in making the determination.

The FAR requires that the contracting officer make a determination of responsibility, (see FAR 9.103(b)). If the prospective contractor is a small business concern, the contracting officer shall comply with FAR 19.6, Certificates of Competency and Determinations of Responsibility. Small businesses found “not responsible” are referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for further assessment. Within 15 business days after receiving a notice that a small business lacks certain elements of responsibility, the SBA Area Office will take certain actions. These actions include informing the small business concern of the contracting agency’s determination and offering the small business an opportunity to apply to the SBA for a Certificate of Competency (COC), (see FAR 19.602-2). A COC is the certificate issued by the SBA stating that the small business is responsible which is binding on the contracting officer for that particular procurement. The offeror must apply for a certificate of competency (COC); this process is not automatic. If the offeror does not apply, no COC will be issued. However, contracting officers may appeal the COC decision, (see FAR 19.602- 3). For more information on COCs, contact the SBA office in your area.

Negotiated Procurements

The most flexible, but sometimes complicated, procedure for procuring products and services is negotiation. Contracting officers use negotiated procurements whenever sealed bidding is not appropriate. A contract awarded using other than sealed bidding procedures is a negotiated contract. Negotiated procurements take many forms. They may call for competitive proposals, may involve restricted competition or may even be sole source. Some permit discussions with offerors, while others allow award of a contract without discussions.

What is Negotiation?

The negotiation procedure permits exchanges between the Government and offerors that are undertaken with the intent of allowing the offeror to revise its proposal, (see FAR 15.306(d)). It may include bargaining between the contracting officer and the offerors. Depending on the size and complexity of the requirement, negotiation may include discussion; persuasion; changes in positions; and give-and-take on price, schedule, technical requirements, type of contract or other contract terms.

What is a Request for Proposal (RFP)?

An RFP is the solicitation package issued under a negotiated procurement; it communicates the Government’s requirements and contains the information necessary for prospective contractors to prepare proposals. Most RFPs follow the uniform contract format as outlined in FAR 15.204. In response to an RFP, prospective contractors submit a price, plus a technical proposal spelling out how they will approach the need described in the solicitation. RFPs include

the criteria by which proposals will be evaluated.

The recommendations in this chapter for preparing a bid using Sealed Bid Checklist also apply to preparing an offer. When you respond to an RFP, pay particular attention to the evaluation criteria and the relative importance of each factor. If more emphasis is placed on "workplan," for example, then that part of your proposal should be developed in accordance with the relative importance of the evaluation factor.

How Contractors Are Selected and Evaluated

In selecting among offers submitted in response to an RFP, the contracting officer considers not only price, but also the offeror's ability to meet the Government's requirements and carry out the terms of a contract. Selection includes the evaluation of technical and cost/price proposals, negotiations between contracting officers and offerors and selection of the offer that represents the "best value" to the Government, (see FAR 15.302).

Evaluation of Proposals

Contracting officers evaluate proposals on the factors and subfactors specified in the solicitation. These may include workplan, proposed contract personnel, the offeror's experience, price quotations, quality and other criteria. Selection may involve evaluation of proposals by a review panel and ranking of offerors according to set criteria.

The contracting officer will determine which proposals are competitive enough to remain under consideration during negotiation and will establish a "competitive range". Offerors whose proposals are judged not to be in this competitive range are notified in writing that their proposals are no longer being considered.

Negotiation

Negotiation may include the discussion of the offeror's technical and price proposals or other terms and conditions of the proposed contract. This is the phase of the acquisition where the contracting officer and the offeror discuss the specific aspects of the offeror's proposals and those areas where it doesn't meet the Government's needs, and where the cost/price may be discussed. It should be noted, however, that the contracting officer may award a contract without holding discussions if the solicitation states that the Government intends to evaluate proposals and make award without discussions, (see FAR 15.306(a)(3)).

Proposal Revisions

After conclusion of the negotiations, offerors remaining in the competitive range are invited to submit proposal revisions. At this time, offerors can make their prices as competitive as possible and address specific questions and concerns raised during negotiation/discussions.

Qualifying for Consideration

Just as in sealed bidding, an offeror must be considered responsible in order to receive a contract. GSA also may have to audit the winning offeror before the contract can be awarded.

Responsible Offerors

In determining responsibility, the contracting officer will consider whether the offeror has adequate financial resources to perform the contract, has a satisfactory record of past performance and integrity, has the necessary skills and facilities to perform the needed work and will be able to comply with the delivery or performance schedule, (see FAR 9.104-1). When finding a small business "nonresponsible," the contracting officer must refer the determination to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for further investigation. If SBA finds that the offeror is competent to perform the contract, SBA will issue a certificate of competency (COC), which is binding on the contracting officer for that particular offer, with certain exceptions. For more information on COCs, contact the Small Business Administration office in your area.

Audits

Prior to the award of certain contracts, GSA's Office of the Inspector General conducts audits to verify and evaluate information presented in offers, particularly cost proposals. Audits help determine if a proposed price is fair and reasonable when contracts are awarded on the basis of factors other than price. GSA audits most proposals for negotiated contracts worth over \$500,000 and in special situations may audit proposals for contracts between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

Debriefing of Offerors

There are two classes of debriefing: "pre-award" and "post-award". An unsuccessful offeror can request either of the two. To request a pre-award debriefing, the offeror may submit a written request to the contracting officer within 3 days after receipt of a notice excluding its offer from the competition, (see FAR 15.505). To request a post-award

debriefing, a written request must be submitted within 3 days after receiving a notice of contract award, (see FAR 15.506). If the offeror does not submit a timely request, the offeror need not be given either a pre-award or a post-award debriefing. Offerors are entitled to no more than one debriefing for each proposal. Debriefing may be done orally, in writing or by any other method acceptable to the contracting officer. The contracting officer shall include an official summary of the debriefing in the contract file.

Pre-award Debriefing

At a minimum a pre-award debriefing must include: GSA's evaluation of the significant elements in the offeror's proposal;

- GSA's evaluation of the significant elements in the offeror's proposal;
- A summary of the rationale for eliminating the offeror from the competition; and
- Reasonable responses to relevant questions about whether the source selection procedures that were stated in the solicitation, regulations and other authorities were followed in eliminating the offeror's proposal, (see FAR 15.505(e)).

The pre-award debriefings may not disclose the number of offers received, nor can it disclose identity of other offerors, the content of other offerors' proposals or the ranking or evaluation of other offerors. Also, any information prohibited from disclosure or exempt from release under the Freedom of Information Act cannot be provided.

Post-award Debriefing

At a minimum, a post-award debriefing must include: GSA's evaluation of the significant weaknesses or deficiencies in the offeror's proposal;

The overall evaluated cost or price and technical rating of the successful offeror and the debriefed offeror and past performance information on the debriefed offeror;

- The overall ranking of all offerors when ranking was developed by the agency;
- A summary of the rationale for award;
- For acquisitions of commercial items, the make and model of the item to be delivered by the successful offeror; and
- Reasonable responses to relevant questions about whether the source selection procedures that were stated in the solicitation, regulations and other authorities were followed in eliminating the offeror's proposal, (see FAR 15.506(d)).

The post-award debriefing may not include point-by-point comparisons of the debriefed offeror's proposal with those of other offerors. In addition, as in the pre-award debriefing, any information prohibited from disclosure or exempt from release under the Freedom of Information Act cannot be provided.

Architect/Engineer Selection Process

GSA awards contracts for design services to the most highly qualified architect/engineer (A/E) firms. They are selected according to criteria published in FedBizOpps on the basis of demonstrated competence and qualifications for the type of professional service required.

Locating GSA Design Projects

GSA announces specific projects in FedBizOpps. Project notices give the location and scope of a project and also contain such information as:

- Estimated construction contract award range
- Project schedule and the date and time limit for receiving replies
- Categories of evaluation criteria and their relative importance
- Any requirements for submitting supplemental information

Design Service Contracts

Design contracts are awarded for, but not limited to, such projects as:

- Federal office buildings, courthouses and research centers
- Mechanical and electrical systems and elevators
- Engineering specialties
- Repairs and alterations to existing buildings
- Renovation of historical structures

Where and How To Apply

Architect/engineer firms interested in being considered for design service contracts should read the notices published in

FedBizOpps and then submit the required forms to the specified Public Buildings Service (PBS) Regional office. The first form required is a Standard Form (SF) 254: Architect-Engineer and Related Services Questionnaire. The form must be filed with a GSA Regional PBS office each year and can be updated and resubmitted at any time. A completed form furnishes GSA with general information on the size, capabilities, personnel and past experience of an interested firm. Firms are encouraged to submit annually an updated statement of qualifications and performance data on an SF 254. To be considered for a specific project, an A/E firm must submit an SF 255: Architect-Engineer and Related Services Questionnaire for Specific Project. Copies of these forms are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; telephone (202) 512-1800 or visit <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/locations/index.html>. Electronic versions of the forms are available on the GSA website at <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/formslibrary.jsp>.

How GSA Selects a Professional Services Firm

To ensure objectivity in selecting an A/E contractor, GSA has separate review boards and approving authorities for each region. Qualified professionals make evaluations, and deliberations are held in strict confidence.

Design Excellence Program

GSA wants top-quality design for all its Federal buildings projects—construction, renovation, alterations and repairs, large and small. To satisfy this demand for talent, and to open up greater opportunities for emerging talent and small businesses, GSA has initiated its Design Excellence Program. The program stresses creativity. It also streamlines the way GSA hires architects and engineers, substantially cutting the cost of competing for GSA design contracts. The Design Excellence Program operates through GSA's Public Buildings Service (PBS). PBS directs the Federal Government's multibillion-dollar building program, which includes construction, renovation, alteration and repair of Federal office buildings, courthouses and other facilities. Most of PBS's work is in partnership with A/E groups from the private sector. For a brochure describing the program's procedures, write to the U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service (PC), Washington, DC 20405, call (202) 501-1888, or visit the GSA Web Site at <http://www.gsa.gov/>, go to "Public Buildings", then "Design and Construction"; the Design Excellence Program is listed on the right as a related offering.

Contract Performance and Completion

For satisfactory contract performance, you must understand the requirements of your contract and follow all the procedures and instructions carefully.

A contractor's record of performance becomes an important part of the contract file. Other contracting officers will note rejections, late deliveries and other failures of performance as they review performance records to determine the responsibility and eligibility of firms for future contracts. If your performance is satisfactory and you deliver quality products and services, you will have more opportunities for future GSA contracts.

Operating Requirements

A contract not only obligates a vendor to provide a product or service; it also requires that the firm operate its business in compliance with certain laws and regulations. Following are some examples of the requirements you might expect to see and where you may obtain additional information on the subject.

- Equal Employment Opportunity
Title 41 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR),
Chapter 60
FAR 22.8
- Labor Laws
FAR 22
- Environment, Conservation, Occupational Safety and
Drug-Free Workplace
FAR 23

Performance Review

Contracting officers continually review the performance of vendors by monitoring contract performance and inspecting the supplies or services furnished. The contracting officer will call any deficiencies in performance to the attention of the contractor and will work with the contractor to resolve the deficiencies.

If corrections to the deficiencies are not possible and the product or services do not conform to contract requirements, the Government may assess deductions from payment in accordance with the contract, may have grounds to terminate the contract for unacceptable performance, and may obtain the supplies or services from another supplier. A vendor

whose contract is terminated for default may be required to pay any additional costs of repurchase incurred by the Government as a result of the default termination.

Contractors who default may also be prohibited from doing business with the Federal Government and be included in GSA's *List of Parties Excluded from Federal Procurement and Nonprocurement Programs*. This monthly publication lists business firms and individuals excluded from receiving Federal contracts, certain subcontracts and certain Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance. Individual copies or subscriptions are available at a cost, through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, telephone (202) 512-1800; copies are available in public libraries; the publication is also available at <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/>; or may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.epls.gov/>. Given the possibility of losing a contract or being debarred, you should be certain that you can satisfy the requirements of a contract before submitting a bid or offer.

Submitting Your Invoice

Every contract or purchase order has instructions for preparing and submitting invoices. If the instructions are not complete or clear, call the contracting officer immediately. It is a good idea to confirm invoicing procedures the first time you submit an invoice under a contract. Careful attention to these procedures will help ensure that you get paid on time. All Federal agencies are required, by the Prompt Payment Act, to pay on the date specified in the contract, in accordance with discount terms when discounts are offered and taken, in accordance with accelerated payment methods or within 30 days after the date of the Government's receipt of the proper invoice, (see 5 CFR 1315.4). The law also requires interest penalties to be paid on late payments.

Vendor Inquiry on GSA's CFO Website

The GSA Office of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) website allows vendors to inquire about payments issued to them. The site is located at <http://www.finance.gsa.gov>. This page is password protected and contains instructions on how to obtain a password to gain access.

Contract Appeals

The Contract Disputes Act of 1978, as amended, establishes procedures and requirements for asserting and resolving contractual claims subject to the Act, (see FAR 33.202). The Government's policy is to try to resolve all contractual disagreements by mutual agreement. However, sometimes a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, and the contractor may submit a claim to the contracting officer for a final decision in accordance with FAR 33.206(a), or the contracting officer may issue a written decision on any Government claim initiated in accordance with FAR 33.206(b). A contractor may appeal the contracting officer's final decision to the agency board of contract appeals or the United States Court of Federal Claims, (see FAR 33.211).

The GSA Board of Contract Appeals hears, considers and decides disputes between contractors and GSA under provisions of the Contract Disputes Act of 1978 and regulations issued there under. The General Accounting Office (GAO) has statutory authority to hear bid protests. Additional information on this subject, may be obtained in FAR, Part 33, or write to the Board of Contract Appeals (G), U.S. General Services Administration, Washington, DC 20405.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Alternative dispute resolution procedures may be used any time that the contracting officer has authority to resolve an issue in controversy. The objective of using ADR procedure is to increase the opportunity for relatively inexpensive and expeditious resolution of issues in dispute. A neutral person may be used to facilitate resolution of the issue in controversy, when appropriate.

Contract Award Tips

- **Read and understand all parts of the contract.** The contract sets forth your obligations and rights, and protects you and the agency. Each sentence is significant because it covers a specific requirement.
- **Comply with specifications.** The specifications or scope of work precisely describe the properties of materials, the dimensions, quality and reliability levels, as well as other characteristics required.
- **Consult the contracting officer.** Any questions about the contract terms and delivery should be raised with the contracting officer.
- **Get it in writing.** If the contracting officer orders changes, make sure they are well documented.
- **Know the payment procedure.** Check the contract's instructions for submitting invoices. If they are unclear or

incomplete, call the contracting officer immediately. Follow billing instructions carefully.

- **Bill the Government accurately.** Government regulations that protect you as a taxpayer require you as a contractor to submit a bill that is accurate in all respects. Put the Pegasys document number (PDN) and the order or contract number on the invoice. Errors in billing can delay your contract payments.
- **Make sure your accounting system meets Government requirements.** This is especially important when the contract permits price revisions based on costs.
- **Maintain careful records.** Keep all pertinent documents and case histories, whether required by the contract or not.
- **Deliver on schedule.** Observe all time requirements.

How to Contact the Office of Small Business Utilization

The GSA, Office of Small Business Utilization is headquartered at 1800 F Street, NW., Room 6029, Washington, DC 20405, telephone (202) 501-1021; the website is at <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>.

How to Contact the Regional Small Business Utilization Centers (SBUCs)

In 12 key locations nationwide, the OSBU has Regional SBUCs that can help you tap the multibillion-dollar GSA "market" for products and services. Their addresses and telephone numbers are listed below, or visit <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>.

Chapter 7

Contacts

New England (1AB)

Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island

France Lopez, Director
Deborah Tarleton
(617) 565-8100
Fax: (617) 565-8101
General Services Administration
Small Business Utilization Center
Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., Federal Building
10 Causeway Street; Room 901
Boston, MA 02222

Northeast and Caribbean (2AR)

New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands

Colleen Pappas, Director
Janice Bracey
(212) 264-1234
Fax: (212) 264-2760
General Services Administration
Program Support and Human Resource Division;
Small Business Utilization Center
26 Federal Plaza; Room 18-130
New York, NY 10278

Mid-Atlantic (3ADS)

Pennsylvania, Delaware, West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia, New Jersey (Princeton down)

Angela DiTommaso, Director

Helena Koch
(215) 446-4918
Fax: (215) 446-5133
General Services Administration
Regional Office of Small Business Utilization
The Strawbridge Building
20 North Eighth Street, 9th floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Southeast Sunbelt (4E)

Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi

Mildred Quinley, Director
Rebecca Vanover
(404) 331-5103
Fax: (404) 331-1721
General Services Administration
Regional Office of Small Business Utilization
77 Forsyth Street; 6th floor
Atlanta, GA 30303

Great Lakes (5ADC)

Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

Ronald Rennhack, Director
Jim Czysz,
Beverly Coley
(312) 353-5383
Fax: (312) 886-9893
General Services Administration
Office of Business and Congressional Services
Small Business Utilization Center
230 South Dearborn Street;
Room 3718 mail stop: 37-5
Chicago, IL 60604
Satellite Office:
Anthony D. Outley
(614) 374-0133

The Heartland (6ADB)

Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska

Pat Brown-Dixon, Director
Ruby Rice,
Lois Phillips
(816) 926-7203
Fax: (816) 823-1167
General Services Administration
Office of Small Business Utilization
and Support Services
1500 East Bannister Road; Room 1160
Kansas City, MO 64131-3088

GSA Regional Map

1 NEW ENGLAND REGION
2 NORTHEAST CARIBBEAN REGION
3 MID-ATLANTIC REGION
4 SOUTHEAST SUNBELT REGION
5 GREAT LAKES REGION
6 HEARTLAND REGION
7 GREATER SOUTHWEST REGION
8 ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

9 PACIFIC RIM REGION
10 NORTHWEST/ARCTIC REGION
11 NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

Greater Southwest (7ADB)

Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma

Willie Heath, Director
La'Vida Barnes
(817) 978-0800
Fax: (817) 978-0440
General Services Administration
Office of Small Business Utilization
819 Taylor Street; Room 1E13A
Fort Worth, TX 76102
<http://www.gsa.gov/regions/enterdev.htm>

Rocky Mountain (8AB)

Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota, and North Dakota

Bernabe "Pennie" Estrada, Director
Shirley Hopkins
(303) 236-7408
Fax: (303) 236-7403
General Services Administration
Small Business Utilization Center
Federal Center #41; Room 240
Post Office Box 25006
Denver, CO 80225

Pacific Rim (9ADB)

California, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada

Carol Honore, Director
Lori Falkenstrom
(415) 522-2700
Fax: (415) 522-2705
General Services Administration
Office of Small Business Utilization
Phillip Burton FOB and Courthouse
450 Golden Gate Avenue; Room 5-6535
San Francisco, CA 94102-3400
Satellite Location:
Pamela Smith-Cressel
(213) 894-3210
Fax: (213) 894-7658
300 N. Los Angeles Street; Room 3108
Los Angeles, CA 90012
<http://www.gsa.gov/regions/r9/default.htm>

Northwest/Artic (10AB)

Washington, Idaho, Alaska, Oregon

Sheron Snyder, Director
(253) 931-7956
Fax: (253) 804-4887
General Services Administration
Office of Small Business Utilization
400 15th Street, SW.
Auburn, WA 98001

National Capital (WCAB)

District of Columbia and the nearby Metropolitan Areas of Maryland: (Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties);

Virginia: (Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church; and, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William Counties).

Shaunta Johnson, Director
Arnetta Cook
(202) 708-5804
Fax: (202) 205-2872
General Services Administration
Program Support Division
Small Business Utilization Center
7th and D Streets, SW.; Room 1050
Washington, DC 20407-0001

How to Contact the Small Business Technical Advisors

Rebecca Knighton
Federal Supply Service
Office of Acquisition (FC)
1941 Jefferson Davis Hwy
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 305-5591
Fax: (703) 305-3783

Sarah Harris
Federal Technology Service
Office of Acquisition (TQ)
10304 Eaton Place, #3F24
Fairfax, VA 22030-7525
Telephone: (703) 306-6490
Fax: (703) 306-7458

Phyllis Carr
Public Buildings Service
Office of Business Operations (PX)
1800 F Street, NW., # 4322
Washington, DC 20405
Telephone: (202) 219-1087
Fax: (202) 501-3257

Contacting the FSS Acquisition Centers

To streamline operations, FSS has organized its supply support functions into Acquisition Centers. Products and services are assigned to specific GSA Acquisition Centers and each center is responsible for worldwide procurement of the specific products and services; contacts are indicated below:

Office of Scientific Equipment Center (FCG)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #503
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 305-6626
Web Site: www.fss.gsa.gov/scientific
Customer Service: (703) 605-5653

Information Technology (IT) Acquisition Center (FCI)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #1017
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 305-3038
Web Site: www.fss.gsa.gov/it

Customer Service e-Mail: it.center@gsa.gov

Services Acquisition Center (FCX)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #603
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 305-7261
Web Site: www.fss.gsa.gov/services
Customer Service: (703) 305-6885

Office of Transportation & Property Mgmt (FCX)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #812
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 605-5616
Web Site: www.fss.gsa.gov
Customer Service: (703) 605-5600

Office of Supplies and Administrative Services Acquisition Center (2FY)

26 Federal Plaza
New York, NY 10278
Telephone: (212) 264-0868
Web Site: www.gsa.gov
Customer Service: (212) 264-3592

National Furniture Center (3FN-CO)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #403
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 305-6636
Web Site: www.gsa.gov/
Customer Service: (703) 305-7003

Mid-Atlantic Region (3FNG)

The Strawbridge Building
20 North Eighth Street, 10th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3191
Telephone: (215) 466-5100

Hardware Superstore (6FE)

1500 E. Bannister Road, Building #6
Kansas City, MO 64131
Telephone: (816) 926-7179
Web Site: www.r6.gsa.gov/hac
Customer Service: (816) 926-7315
e-Mail: r6-6feb@gsa.gov

General Products Center (7FC)

819 Taylor Street
Ft. Worth, TX 76102
Telephone: (817) 978-2483
Web Site: www.gsa.gov
Customer Service: (817) 978-2051

Management Services Center (10FT)

400 15th Street, SW
Auburn, WA 98001
Telephone: (253) 931-7353
Web Site: www.northwest.gsa.gov/fss/msc
Customer Service: (800) 241-7246

Vehicle Acquisition & Leasing Services

GSA Automotive (FFA)

Crystal Mall Building 4, #600
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
Telephone: (703) 308-4190
Web Site:

http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/content/offerings_content.jsp?contentOID=119105&contentType=1004

Customer Service/Buying: (703) 308-CARS

e-Mail: vehicle.buying@gsa.gov

GSA Fleet/Leasing: (703) 605-5630

Contacting the FSS Customer Service Directors and Customer/Vendor Relations Directors and Marketing Managers

To make dealings with GSA as easy as possible, the Federal Supply Service maintains a network of commodity specialists. For Customer Service Directors, visit <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/csdmap.jsp>.

Contacting the Federal Technology Service

For additional information on IT Solutions contracting programs at the national level, call or write:

Federal Technology Service Office of Information Technology

Skyline Building 2
23 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3467
Telephone: (703) 756-4300

Federal Technical Service Center of Information Security Services

7th & D Streets, SW
Washington, DC 20704
Telephone: (202) 708-6679

For additional information on Network Services contracting programs at the national level call or write:

Federal Technology Service Comprehensive Telecommunications Acquisitions

Center (TQC)
10300 Eaton Place
Fairfax, VA 22030
Telephone: (703) 306-6420

Federal Technology Service Service Development Acquisitions Center (TQD)

10300 Eaton Place
Fairfax, VA 22030
Telephone: (703) 306-6440

Federal Technology Service Contract Management & Administration Center (TQN)

10300 Eaton Place
Fairfax, VA 22030
Telephone: (703) 306-6430

For information on information technology and networking services contracting programs in your area, contact the appropriate Regional office listed below.

New England Region

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont
Boston, MA (617) 565-5750

Northeast & Caribbean Region

New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands
New York, NY (212) 264-1257

Mid-Atlantic Region

Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia (excludes Washington, DC metropolitan area)
Philadelphia, PA (215) 446-5800

Southeast Sunbelt Region

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee
Atlanta, GA (404) 331-5104

Great Lakes Region

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin
Chicago, IL (312) 886-3284

Heartland Region

Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska
Kansas City, MO (888) 879-3278

Greater Southwest Region

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas
Fort Worth, TX (817) 978-7504

Rocky Mountain Region

Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming
Denver, CO (303) 236-7333

Pacific Rim Region

Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Guam and the Mariana Islands
San Francisco, CA (415) 522-4500

Northwest/Arctic Region

Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington
Auburn, WA (253) 931-7500

National Capital Region

District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, MD; Fairfax, Loudon, Prince William and Arlington Counties, VA; and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church, VA
Washington, DC (202) 708-6100

Contacting the Public Buildings Service**New England Region (1)**

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Federal Building
10 Causeway Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02222-1047
Telephone: (617) 565-5693

Northeast and Caribbean Region (2)

New Jersey (Northeast and Central Counties), New York, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands
General Services Administration

Public Buildings Service
26 Federal Plaza, Room 1605
New York, NY 10278-0007
Telephone: (212) 264-4282

Mid-Atlantic Region (3)

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
20 North Eighth Street, 8th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3191
Telephone: (215) 446-4500

Southeast Sunbelt Region (4)

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
77th Forsyth Street, SW, Suite 420
Atlanta, GA 30303-3427
Telephone: (404) 562-0263

Great Lakes Region (5)

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
230 South Dearborn Street, Room 3600
Chicago, IL 60604-1696
Telephone: (888) 353-5572

Heartland Region (6)

Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
1500 East Bannister Road, Suite 2161
Kansas City, MO 64131-3088
Telephone: (816) 926-7231

Greater Southwest Region (7)

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
819 Taylor Street, Room 11B05
Fort Worth, TX 76102-6114
Telephone: (817) 978-2522

Rocky Mountain Region (8)

Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota,
Utah, Wyoming
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
Denver Federal Center
Building 41, Room 200
Denver, CO 80225-0006
Telephone: (888) 236—7245

Pacific Rim Region (9)

Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana
Islands, Palau, American Samoa
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
450 Golden Gate Avenue, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102-3661

Telephone: (415) 522-3100

Northwest Arctic Region (10)

Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington
Public Buildings Service
400 15th Street, SW
Auburn, WA 98001-6599
Telephone: (253) 931-7200

National Capital Region (11)

District of Columbia, nearby Maryland and Virginia
General Services Administration
Public Buildings Service
7th and D Streets, SW, Room 7080
Washington, DC 20407-0001
Telephone: (202) 708-5891

Appendix A

Useful Websites

GSA's Key Internet Addresses

Environmental Products & Services Guide: <http://pub.fss.gsa.gov/environ>
Federal Supply Service (FSS): <http://www.fss.gsa.gov/>
Federal Technology Service (FTS): <http://www.fts.gsa.gov/>
Forecast of Contracting Opportunities: http://w3.gsa.gov/Web/I/Ion/Con_Opp.NSF
GSA Home Page: <http://www.gsa.gov>.
Office of Small Business Utilization: <http://www.gsa.gov/smallbusiness>
Public Buildings Service (PBS): <http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/browse/channel.jsp?channelId=-13820&channelPage=/channel/default.jsp>

SBA's Key Internet Addresses

8(a): <http://www.sba.gov/8abd/>
Government Contracting: <http://www.sba.gov/GC/>
HUBZone: <http://sba.gov/hubzone>
Minority Enterprise Development: <http://www.sba.gov/hotlist/minor.html>
PRO-Net: <http://pro-net.sba.gov>
SBA's Home Page: <http://www.sba.gov>
SDB: <http://www.sba.gov/sdb>
SUBNet: <http://web.sba.gov/subnet>
Veterans Programs: <http://www.sba.gov/vets>
Women-Owned: <http://www.sba.gov/womeninbusiness>

Key Websites for Small Businesses

Acquisition Network (AcqNet): <http://www.arnet.gov>
Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance: <http://www.cfda.gov>
Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps): <http://www.fedbizopps.gov>
Federal Procurement Data System: <http://www.fpdc.gov>
FirstGov: <http://www.firstgov.gov>
Minority Business Development Agency: <http://www.mbda.gov/>
North American Industry Classification System (NAICS): <http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/naics.html>
Women Entrepreneurs: <http://www.onlinewbc.gov>

Acquisition Network (AcqNet): Internet website for Government-wide acquisition information.

Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA): An agreement between the Government and a supplier allowing repetitive purchases during a specified period, (see FAR 13.303-1).

Certificate of Competency (COC) Program: The COC Program empowers SBA to certify to Government contracting officers as to all elements of responsibility of any small business to receive and perform a specific Government contract. When the contracting officer determines and documents that an apparent successful small business offeror lacks certain elements of responsibility (including but not limited to, capability, competency, capacity, credit, integrity and limitation on subcontracting), the contracting officer must withhold contract award and refer the matter to the cognizant SBA Government Contracting Area Office serving the area in which the headquarters of the offeror is located, (see FAR 19.601(b)).

Commercial Item: Any supply or service, other than real property, that is customarily used for non-Government purposes and that has been sold, leased or licensed to the general public or falls under the additional categories listed in the complete definition of “commercial item” as it appears under FAR 2.101.

Construction Metrication Ombudsman: A senior GSA official responsible for ensuring that GSA is implementing the metric system of measurement in an efficient manner, while ensuring that the goals of the Metric Conversion Act of 1975 are observed.

Cost-Reimbursement Contract: This type of contract provides for payment of allowable incurred costs to the extent prescribed in the contract. (see FAR 16.3).

Contract: A mutually binding legal relationship obligating the seller to furnish the supplies or services and the buyer to pay for them. It includes all types of commitments that obligate the Government to an expenditure of appropriated funds and that, except as otherwise authorized, are in writing. In addition to bilateral instruments, contracts include (but are not limited to) awards and notices of awards; job or delivery orders or task letters issued under basic ordering agreements; orders, such as purchase orders, under which the contract becomes effective by written acceptance or performance; and bilateral contract modifications, (see FAR 2.101).

Contracting Activity: An element of an agency designated by the agency head and delegated broad authority regarding acquisition functions, (see FAR 2.101).

Contracting Officer: A person with the authority to enter into, administer and/or terminate contracts and to make related determinations and findings, (see FAR 2.101).

Electronic Commerce (EC): Electronic techniques for accomplishing business transactions including electronic mail or messaging, World Wide Web technology, electronic bulletin boards, purchase cards, electronic funds transfer and electronic data interchange, (see FAR 2.101).

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI): A technique for electronically transferring and storing formatted information between computers utilizing established and published formats and codes, as authorized by the applicable Federal Information Processing Standards, (see FAR 2.101).

Electronic Posting System (EPS): A method of posting notices of solicitations and the actual solicitations to the Internet. It allows businesses to register to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in their area of interest. The single Government point-of-entry (GPE) for Federal Government procurement opportunities over \$25,000 is at Federal Business Opportunities (FedBizOpps).

Fixed-Price Contract: Contracts that provide for a firm price or, in appropriate cases, an adjustable price. Fixed price contracts providing for an adjustable price may include a ceiling price, a target price (including target cost) or both. Unless otherwise specified in the contract, the ceiling price or the target price is subject to adjustment only by operation of contract clauses providing for equitable adjustment or other revision of the contract price under stated circumstances. The contracting officer shall use firm-fixed price or fixed-price with economic price adjustment contracts when acquiring commercial items, (see FAR 16.201).

Government-wide Commercial Purchase Card: A purchase card, similar in nature to a commercial credit card, issued to authorized agency personnel to use in paying for supplies and services.

Industry: All concerns primarily engaged in similar lines of activity, as listed and described in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Information Technology: Any equipment, or interconnected systems(s) or subsystem(s) of equipment used in the automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information. Includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar procedures, services and related resources, (see FAR 2.101).

Micro-Purchase: An acquisition of supplies or services, the aggregate amount of which does not exceed \$2,500, except in the case of construction, the limit is \$2,000. (see FAR 2.101).

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS): The NAICS replaced the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Codes. NAICS is an industry classification system used by the statistical agencies of the United States for classifying business establishments. NAICS includes 1,170 industries of which 565 are service based industries.

Negotiation: A procedure that includes the receipt of proposals from offerors, permits bargaining, and may afford offerors an opportunity to revise their offers before award of a contract.

Offer: A response to a solicitation that, if accepted, would bind the offeror to perform the resultant contract. Responses to invitations for bid (sealed bidding) are offers called "bids" or "sealed bids"; responses to requests for proposals (negotiation) are offers called "proposals"; responses to requests for quotation (negotiation) are not offers and are called "quotes", (see FAR 2.101).

Purchase Order: When issued by the Government means an offer by the Government to buy supplies or services, upon specified terms and conditions, using simplified acquisition procedures, (see FAR 2.101).

Simplified Acquisition Procedures: The methods prescribed in FAR, Part 13, for making purchases of products or services, (see FAR 2.101).

Small Business Size:: SBA's size standards define whether a business entity is small and, thus, eligible for Government programs and preferences reserved for "small business" concerns. Size standards (see FAR 19.1) have been established for types of economic activity, or industry, generally under the NAICS.

Standards: Technical requirements for processes, procedures, practices and methods that have been adopted as standard.

Task order: An order for services placed against an established contract, or with Government sources. (see FAR 2.101).

Appendix C

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Why should a small business look to GSA as a good prospective customer?

GSA is a major purchaser of products and services sold by small businesses. GSA is always seeking new businesses to compete for its products and service contracts and is committed to increasing opportunities for small, small disadvantaged, women-owned small, HUBZone small, veteran-owned small and service disabled veteran-owned small businesses. The OSBU's Regional SBUCs work with businesses to help them understand the agency's procurement processes and take advantage of special programs for small businesses)

If my business has developed a new product, is GSA a potential customer?

Yes. In its New Products Program, GSA will evaluate your product to determine if it is new or better than existing items. If the Government needs your product, GSA may negotiate a contract to purchase the product from you. To determine what schedule is applicable to your commodity, visit www.gsaelibrary.gsa.gov, type in new products in the search box and locate the applicable category.

How do I find out about opportunities to sell specialized services, products or equipment to other agencies? Call the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) in the Federal agency that buys your product or service. For example, to sell to the Department of Defense (DOD), you would contact the OSDBU in DOD. Visit

<http://www.sba.gov/GC/osdbu.html> for the OSDBU Directory.

Does Government contracting involve a lot of paperwork?

The large, complex contracts may require substantial paperwork. Some contracts do not, particularly simplified acquisitions of \$100,000 or less. Procurement regulations require not only that GSA be fair to suppliers and make taxpayer dollars go as far as possible, but also that the agency be able to document that it is meeting these obligations. In other words, Government paperwork is a necessary part of contracting, and vendors must be able and willing to handle it.

Does a firm have to be certified as a small business by the Small Business Administration (SBA) in order to benefit from GSA's Small Business Program? While certification as a small business is necessary for participation in the GSA Small Business Program, small business status is a self-certification process. Just complete the "Small Business Concern Representation" section contained in all GSA solicitations. The selfcertification process is also used for certification as a women-owned small business. However, the process for certification as a small disadvantaged business, 8(a) or a business within a HUBZone is different. The process for these programs is not self-certifying; to attain status, SBA must certify you.

Small Business	Self-certification
8(a) firms	Certification by SBA
SDB	Certification by SBA*
Women-owned	Self-certification
HUBZone	Certification by SBA
Veteran-owned	Self-certification
Service-Disabled	Self-certification

* The FAR allows the contracting officer to accept selfcertification from SDBs for general statistical purposes; however, an SDB cannot receive any type of preference unless, it has been certified by SBA. In addition, effective on October 1, 1999, SBA must certify all SDB subcontractors. (Prime contractors are no longer allowed to take credit for SDBs that self-certify; this rule applies to contracts resulting from solicitations issued by the Government on or after October 1, 1999).

How do I become eligible to participate in 8(a) set-asides?

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is responsible for certifying that you or your company is eligible to participate in the 8(a) Program. To apply for certification, contact the Office of Eligibility and Certification in the SBA office that serves your area.

Who determines which GSA contracts are set-aside for small businesses and the 8(a) Program?

It is up to the contracting officers to decide which contracts are set aside. However, the Regional SBUCs monitor contracts and recommend those suitable for the 8(a) Program.

As a small business, how do I become a subcontractor for a prime contractor?

Register your business with the PRO-Net at your local Small Business Administration office. Also, market your firm's capabilities directly with prime contractors. The GSA Subcontracting Directory and the Forecast of GSA Contracting Opportunities will help you find companies that have large GSA contracts and subcontracting plans.

Is there any system for monitoring how well large prime contractors meet their subcontracting goals?

Yes. Large prime contractors are required to submit annual reports documenting good faith efforts to meet their subcontracting goals. If a report, as well as a thorough follow-up investigation, indicates that a contractor is not making a good faith effort, the contracting officer may take appropriate action. These possible actions include withholding payment until the contractor comes into compliance with the subcontracting plan, terminating a contract on the grounds of default and assessment of liquidated damages.

Does the location of my business affect my ability to compete for GSA contracts?

It depends on the solicitation. Solicitations for repair and maintenance and small construction jobs may be limited to the geographic area needing the service. Others, such as solicitations for GSA Supply Catalog items and for large building projects, are open to vendors throughout the United States. In addition, FSS Acquisition Centers handle procurement of the products and services for which they are responsible.

Will being on a GSA Schedule benefit my company?

Yes, having your product/service carried as a Schedule item, can benefit your company if it also has adequate cash flow, an effective delivery system and a vigorous marketing program. Being on a Schedule does not guarantee an order. However, Schedules can generate substantial orders for firms that actively market their products or services. Many

businesses on Schedule find that marketing requires catalogs, which can involve significant production and printing costs. With GSA Advantage! on-line shopping, GSA is moving toward cutting these costs.

Is it possible to be listed on more than one Schedule?

Yes, if you have more than one product or service to sell. Be sure to register with the FedBizOpps System for each item you sell to receive e-mail notification of opportunities in your areas of interest.

Are there categories of products or services GSA never buys?

Yes. For example, GSA never buys cattle, insurance, weapons or weapon systems. However, it does buy many support items for the Military, such as paint, hand tools, office supplies and sandbags.

Does GSA buy specialized equipment and services?

For the most part, no; however, agencies that use specialized items are buyers. For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs buys hospital equipment; the Department of Agriculture buys seeds and fertilizer; and the Department of Defense buys military equipment.

How can I learn more about architect/engineer contracting with GSA and other Federal agencies?

GSA's Design Excellence Program booklet gives information on architect/engineer contracting procedures. For a copy or further information on contracting opportunities, contact the GSA, Public Buildings Service, Center for Design Excellence and the Arts (PCE), 1800 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20405; or the PBS Small Business Technical Advisor on (202) 219-1087.

When I'm marketing my product or service to GSA, should I start with a Regional SBUC or go straight to a contracting office?

Start at a Regional SBUC, Regional SBUC business specialists can tell you which GSA contracting offices are most likely to be interested. A specialist can also give you hints on what contracting offices will want to know or have submitted to them.

Does GSA use specifications and standards adopted by the private sector?

GSA's policy is to adopt the appropriate specifications and standards of nationally recognized technical organizations, whenever appropriate, and to obtain input from these groups and individual firms on proposed specifications and standards.

Where can I get copies of specifications and standards?

Most solicitations will say where to obtain copies. You may also get copies from the purchasing office that issued the solicitation. Copies of Federal specifications and standards that are not related to a particular solicitation may be purchased from:

GSA FSS, Specification Section (3FP-E)

470 East L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 8100

Washington, DC 20407

Telephone: (202) 619-8925

Fax: (202) 619-8985

What's the difference between a Federal specification and a standard?

Federal specifications are technical data used to describe Government-unique products or those, which, for reasons of health, safety or interface requirements, must be described in detail or undergo extensive testing. A standard is a set of criteria used to compare like products or services and ensure that certain quality and performance levels are met.

My contract calls for my company to make an item in accordance with the specification, but I have a way to do the job better for less money. What should I do?

You may contact the contracting officer and present your ideas.

Some of the clauses in my contract seem to be important, but the text of the clauses is missing. What do I do?

When a contract refers to standard clauses listed elsewhere, you still must comply with the clause requirements. The full text of the clauses can be found in the FAR or the GSAM, or you may request a copy of the clauses from the procurement official listed in the solicitation.

How can I find simplified acquisition contracting opportunities at GSA?

Procurements under \$25,000 will require you to do research and engage in direct marketing to GSA offices that buy what you sell. Your first point of contact should be a SBUC. A specialist can advise you on which GSA offices to contact, special GSA programs for small businesses, and the procedures that you must follow.

What procurements under the simplified acquisition procedures are reserved?

Except for those acquisitions set aside for very small business concerns, each acquisition of products or services that has an anticipated dollar value exceeding \$2,500, but not over \$100,000, is automatically reserved exclusively for small business concerns. It is set aside, unless the contracting officer determines there is not a reasonable expectation of obtaining offers from two or more responsible small businesses that are competitive in terms of market prices, quality and delivery, (see FAR 19.502-2).

Are small private companies the only sources for purchases under the simplified acquisition threshold?

No. All Government contracting officers must use mandatory/required sources of supply for some types of items before soliciting outside quotations. Those mandatory sources include Federal Prison Industries (UNICOR), National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH, formerly the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped. Many requirements are filled as delivery orders against GSA Schedule contracts or other established contracts.

Can dealers compete successfully against manufacturers for supply contracts under simplified acquisition procedures?

Yes, they can, provided the products or services that small business dealers offer are their own or those of another small business.

Is there a limit on the dollar amount of sealed bid purchases?

No, but generally the sealed bid procedure is not used for purchases under \$100,000.

What should I do when an IFB is unclear?

Call the contracting officer named in the solicitation.

What should I do if I feel I can't meet the requirements stated or cited in a solicitation?

Do not submit a bid or proposal.

What should I do if after I carefully check and submit my bid, I discover that it contains an error?

Contact the contracting officer. If you discover the error before the bid opening, you can modify your bid by any method authorized by the solicitation, if notice is received in the office designated in the solicitation not later than the exact time set for opening of bids, (see FAR 14.303(a)). Mistakes in bids discovered after the opening of bids are governed by the procedures in FAR 14.407.

Can I get a copy of other firms' offers during negotiations?

No. Offers submitted in response to a solicitation are kept confidential. However, after the contract is awarded, you may be told the name and address of each firm receiving an award, the quantities and prices of each award, and, in general terms, the reason your proposal was not accepted. You may request a meeting with the contracting officer to discuss your proposal. These meetings are called "debriefings". Debriefing information includes GSA's evaluation of the weak or deficient factors in your proposal but will not compare your proposal with other offerors' proposals.

Can I submit my advertising material as an unsolicited proposal?

No. Rules governing unsolicited proposals state that advertising material and commercial product offers are not unsolicited proposals within the meaning of FAR 15.6. An unsolicited proposal means a written proposal for a new or innovative idea that is submitted to an agency on the initiative of the offeror for the purpose of obtaining a contract with the Government, and this is not in response to a request for proposals, Broad Agency Announcement, Small Business Innovation Research topic, Small Business Technology Transfer Research topic, Program Research and Development Announcement or any other Government initiated solicitation or program, (see FAR 2.101). The Government may accept an unsolicited proposal that demonstrates a unique or innovative concept not otherwise available in accordance with the provisions of FAR 15.6. However, GSA is not responsible for costs incurred in proposal preparation. Therefore, before starting, you would be wise to consult with appropriate agency officials. An OSBU SBUC (listed in Chapter 7) can direct you to the GSA office that purchases the type of product or service you wish to offer.

Are RFP's always in writing?

No. In emergency situations, GSA may use oral solicitations. Sometimes, when competition is restricted (such as when a purchase must be made from a particular source), a letter RFP is used. Facsimile RFPs are used by some agencies. Eventually, most RFPs and offers will be made via electronic commerce.

Is it necessary that I have electronic commerce/electronic data interchange (EC/EDI) capability to do business with GSA?

Yes. We pay vendors electronically and in some cases require contractors to provide electronic catalogues.

Whom should I contact if GSA doesn't live up to its obligations under the Prompt Payment Act?

You should contact the contracting officer.

What can I do to increase my chances of being paid on time?

Read the contract instructions on submitting invoices and double check your invoice and other required documents to see that they are completed correctly and addressed to the right office. They should also contain the Pegasys document number (PDN) and the order number or contract number. The PDN is particularly important because the finance office uses it to track payments.

If my company is awarded a Schedules contract, to whom do I deliver?

A Schedules contract does not directly call for delivery of products or services. It is a way for agencies, including GSA, to easily order the items on the Schedule. If your company has been awarded a Schedules contract, you must continue to market your products and services to Government offices and encourage them to place orders with your company. When you receive an order, you will deliver directly to the agency that placed the order.